

Sleep Tips for Children

There are some SleepAbility tips for families of children to develop positive sleep practices and prevent a child's sleep pattern becoming an ongoing sleep disturbance.

- Consistent bedtime routines, eliminating night feeding, adequate diet and physical activity during the day greatly improve sleep in children.
- Set a regular time for bed each night and wake up time each morning. Keep the time consistent on weekdays and weekends.
- Establish a predictable and consistent bedtime routine of approximately 30 minutes with calm activities, with the last part occurring in the child's bed.
- Keep the hour before bedtime relaxing, as too much activity can keep a child awake (over-aroused).
- Time spent outside and exercising during the day assist sleep at night.
- Avoid large meals close to bedtime; however a small healthy snack before teeth cleaning may assist in settling to sleep. Avoid foods with caffeine such as chocolate for at least 4–6 hours prior to bedtime. Reduce or eliminate night feeds.
- Daytime naps need to be geared to the child's age and development. Very long naps, extra naps or naps in the late afternoon can result in a child sleeping less at night.
- Provide a comfortable bed 'nest', warm-to-cool in temperature, reduced noise level and make the space as dark as possible (use a night light if needed).
- Aim for your child to go to bed sleepy but awake, so they can fall asleep relatively quickly by themselves in the same place as where they sleep all night.
- Children commonly need self-soothing strategies to help induce sleep (thumb-sucking, dummy, self-rocking) and transitional objects for security (blanket, music box, teddy bear).
- Children who fall asleep without parental assistance are less likely to 'signal' parents/carers when they wake at night and will be more likely to self-soothe back to sleep.
- Communication strategies appropriate to the child's developmental level will reinforce positive sleep practices.

Children with developmental delay who need parental presence to go to sleep or to get back to sleep may require behavioural and/or sensory strategies for change in sleep patterns. Children with poor self-soothing strategies or separation anxiety may require additional sensory inputs to induce and maintain sleep.

Adapted from Sleepwise Programme, Child & Youth Disability Services, SA