

Victoria Nursery School

Your guide to bedtime routines and a good nights sleep!

Children aged 3-5 years need 10-13 hours of sleep a night.

Sometimes children can take a while to settle and get to sleep. This is because they're busy thinking about the day even after they go to bed. Sleep is important for your pre-schooler's health, growth and development. When children get enough good-quality sleep, they're more settled and happy during the day. Getting the right amount of sleep also strengthens your child's immune system and reduces the risk of infection and illness.

One of the easiest ways to set your child up for good sleep is by creating a **bedtime routine**. The good news is that it only takes a few nights of following a bedtime routine to see improvements in your child's sleep. Bedtime routines are a consistent, repetitive set of activities that are carried out before bed every night. They help prepare your child for sleep by having them relax and wind down. A predictable routine also gives your child a sense of security and teaches them how to fall asleep on their own.

Research shows that children who follow bedtime routines are more likely to go to sleep earlier, take less time falling asleep, sleep longer, and wake up less during the night. In addition to improving sleep, bedtime routines teach your child self-care and lay the ground for working memory, attention, and other cognitive skills. They also foster parent-child bonding and may help improve mood, stress levels, and behaviour. In the long term, these benefits translate to better readiness for school, as well as better academic performance and social skills.

How to Build a Bedtime Routine for your child

A simple bath, book, bed routine every night will let your child know that it will soon be time for bed and that it's time to put the toys and games away, and cuddle up for a story, helping their brains unwind and letting their imagination soar before bedtime.

A bedtime routine for kids usually consists of three or four activities, for example, having a snack, brushing teeth, putting on pyjamas, and reading a book. These should always be done in the same order. To make the routine even more effective, start winding down the household by dimming the lights and turning off screens in the lead-up to bed.

Typical bedtime activities that have been shown to have beneficial effects on sleep include:

- Nutritious snack
- Bath
- Brushing teeth and going to the bathroom
- Reading a book
- Lullaby or singing a song together
- Talking about their day

The bedtime routine should finish with in a goodnight kiss/ hug and lights out. You should leave the room while your child is sleepy but not asleep yet. This way they learn to fall asleep on their own, and they won't panic if they wake up in the middle of the night and find you gone. Set a consistent bedtime that leaves enough time for your child to sleep the recommended amount of hours for their age.

Bedtime Dos and Don'ts

Certain activities are counterproductive to sleep and may cause your child to form unhealthy habits. Of course, every child is different and you may find it takes some trial-and-error to find out what works best for your family. However, when crafting your child's bedtime routine, try to stick to the following advice:

Do:

- Do it every day: A night-time routine for kids should consist of the same steps every night or as many nights as possible. To get all the benefits, it's important for both parents to participate in the bedtime routine where possible.
- Keep it short and sweet: For most children, a bedtime routine should last around half an hour, or a little longer if there's a bath included. Prolonging the routine can delay bedtime and makes it harder to implement on days when you're short on time.
- Keep it up during the day: Following a routine during the day, including setting clear limits, leads to increase sleep duration for young children. Getting lots of exercise, sunlight, and outdoor time during the day can also help them sleep better at night.
- Listen to your child: Although you're ultimately in charge, it's not a bad thing to leave your child some liberty. If a part of the bedtime routine isn't working for your child, listen to their concerns and adapt the routine if necessary.
- Follow sleep hygiene rules: Keep the bedroom dark, cool, and quiet to promote sleep. If your child is scared of the dark, you can use a dim nightlight. Even after bedtime, noise levels in the rest of the house can keep young children awake, so try to transition to quieter activities once you've tucked the kids in.
- Make gradual changes: Try not to introduce more than one change at a time to the bedtime routine, and consider delaying these if there are other changes going on, such as moving to a new house or starting school. As your child's sleep needs change, shift bedtime by 15-minute increments each night.

Don't:

- Start when they're already sleepy: Overtired children can be hyperactive or grumpy and will find it even harder to fall asleep, so try to start the routine before they start yawning.
- Let them use screens: The blue light from television and other electronic devices has serious consequences for sleep if used too close to bedtime.
- Let them run around: Your child should have plenty of opportunities to burn off steam during the day, but don't let them work themselves into a frenzy at night or they'll be too wired to sleep.
- Give sugary treats or caffeine: Try to keep evening snacks light and healthy. Caffeine will keep kids awake, and sugary treats before bed can lead to cavities. Breakfast cereals, chocolate, and pudding can be sources of caffeine you may not expect.
- Read scary bedtime stories: Avoid scary stories and other mentally or physically stimulating activities before bed.
- Let them sleep in on weekends: It's tempting to catch up on sleep on non-schooldays, but straying more than an hour from the usual wake-up time can actually cause trouble falling asleep on weekdays.