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SafeSleepSpace^{SSS}

The emerging toddler and the importance of sleep

12 MONTHS – 24 MONTHS

EARLY YEARS SLEEP GUIDE SERIES: FOUR



Before you know it; your baby is developing into a toddler and they will become increasingly aware of the world around them.

As their independence and autonomy flourish, the toddler brain is very much in a state of flux. And while this can be an exciting time for a toddler, it can also be challenging and frustrating for both toddler and for you as a parent, as they begin to exert their independence and insist on doing things on their own!

'Mine', 'Me', 'I do it' and 'No' are some of a toddler's favourite sayings.



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Predictability is the key to sleep

Toddlers have a lot going on! They are actively learning new things, however, are sensitive to changes, and as a result can get overwhelmed and overtired and be really difficult to settle.

Toddlers thrive on understanding, so it's best to keep explanations brief and clear. Lengthy discussion will be lost on them as they can only focus for short periods of time.

Similarly, it is best to package up tasks for toddlers into small, manageable and achievable activities so they can experience a sense of achievement.

Toddlers also love to show you what comes next and therefore thrive on predictability and anticipation. So as parents, if you can respond in a predictable manner to your toddler's cues, they will learn to anticipate your response. And it's the act of anticipation that will help the toddler feel grounded and therefore be better equipped to settle to sleep.

Create a predictable sleep time routine

By creating a predictable sleep time routine, we can help foster this sense of safety and security. Most importantly, a sleep time routine can help promote quality sleep, which is important for consolidating memories, conserving energy and releasing growth hormones in our children.



I need reassurance!

Toddlers' brains are immature. Their impulsivity and impatience are part and parcel of being a very little person and toddlers can find transitioning to sleep challenging. It's important to make changes slowly and gently, while being considerate of their behaviour and feelings. If they are not accustomed to a sleep time routine, it will take time for them to adjust to this new set of behaviours.



And these big feelings can fuel intense frustration — for toddler and parent alike!

It is therefore so important to be respectful of the emotional capacities of a toddler. They are not adults and do not always understand adult reasoning — especially when they are tired!

How much sleep should my toddler be getting?

- Toddlers need between 11 and 14 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period.
- On average, a 12-month-old naps for about 2 hours twice a day.
- By about 18 months of age, some toddlers may drop one nap, or may have one which is longer and one which is shorter.
- By about 2 years of age one 2–3 hour nap is quite normal, with a shorter nap occasionally.

It's normal for toddlers to resist sleep!

Common sleep challenges at this age include:-

Standing up but can't sit

When a child reaches a new developmental milestone — like sitting up, crawling, standing or walking — it's not uncommon for sleep problems to occur. If you have a child who learns to stand up in their cot yet doesn't yet have the skills to get back down, enter their room and offer settling for about 15 to 20 seconds before you assist your toddler to sit or lie down. This allows the toddler an experience of settling before you actually begin to move them.

You can also use play time to teach the child the motion of sitting back down from standing. Give them lots of opportunity to practice standing up and sitting back down holding on to your hands.



Standing up and can sit, but won't!

Rather than doing the 'I lie you down...you jump back up' routine, enter the room, stay low and reach into the cot and pat the mattress. The idea is to encourage the toddler to come down to you.

Independence at this time is critical to a toddler.

The toddler may instantly come down to you or refuse. Whatever they do, just remain consistent in your response and progressively they will come down to you each time, voluntarily.

Toddler still wanting overnight bottles — help!

There are very few toddlers who need a bottle of milk overnight for nutritional reasons. Always check in with your health professional if unsure to discuss.

Often an overnight bottle becomes a habit or a common sleep association that a toddler becomes to rely on. It is also often easier as a parent to give a toddler a quick bottle!

Think of the long term gain and the solid sleep pattern though that your toddler will be able to achieve if you can stop this overnight bottle.

For more tips on how to stop a toddlers bottles [go here](#).

A little warning about waking a sleeping toddler!

The sleep cycle is now lengthening to around 60 minutes.

It's not uncommon as parents to ask...."Can my toddler be woken so they don't sleep too long in the afternoon?"

If you are considering this, be cautious about waking a toddler midway through a sleep cycle – that is, when they are in deep, non-REM sleep.

Waking a toddler at this stage will likely result in a very cranky child who is still tired. And we know that an over-tired toddler is less likely to settle well at night-time.

Remember — sleep promotes sleep, so it's best to let the toddler complete their nap or at the very least, complete a full sleep cycle before waking them.

To know when this is apparent, behaviours that indicate a child is in active sleep or REM sleep include twitching, jerking or making little sounds

How do I transition my toddler from two naps to one?

Toddlers are usually ready to drop their morning nap at around 15 to 18 months.

So how will you know?

If you notice your toddler is consistently taking longer to fall asleep at their morning nap, is waking earlier from their morning nap, or is sleeping longer at their morning nap and then resisting their afternoon nap, it may be time to make the transition.

How do I make this transition?

The most successful way to make the transition is to push the morning nap a little later every couple of days. For example, try delaying it until around 11:00am for two or three days. Then push it until 11:30am for a few days, then to noon, and so on. Your ultimate goal is to have the child asleep by about 12:30pm or 1:00pm, within 7–10 days.

Safe sleeping and key messages

Important to still remember the [6 key safe sleeping messages](#)

Cot to Bed safety awareness — moving from a cot to a bed

Red Nose Safe Sleeping guidelines state that once a child is observed attempting to climb out of a cot, it's time to move them from a cot to a bed. For most children this move from a cot to a bed is often between 2 and 3½ years, but may be earlier.

Guidelines also state that a port-a-cot is unsafe if a child weighs more than 15kg.

The transition to a bed and the increase in a toddler's mobility at sleep time, also brings about a number of important safety considerations.

Here's some safe sleeping suggestions:

1. Use a mattress on the floor or a toddler bed.
2. Choose a firm, flat mattress. Keep the bed or mattress on the floor away from walls to reduce suffocation risk.
3. Keep pillows out of the bed or mattress for children under two years — pillows are a suffocation risk for young children.
4. Keep the area around the mattress clear of soft toys, bean bags, plastic bags or similar objects that a young



child can roll onto. Soft objects could mould around a young child's face, resulting in suffocation.

5. Keep dangling cords, strings and mobiles out of reach as they could get caught around a child's neck.
6. Keep heaters, electrical appliances and access to power points well away to avoid the risk of overheating, burns and electrocution.
7. Ensure all furniture and TVs are attached with wall brackets so they cannot be readily tipped over.
8. Ensure stairs and windows are not accessible.
9. Pay special attention to any other potential hazards that may result in falls, drowning, strangulation, entrapment or poisoning.
10. If your toddler / child is in a sleeping bag whilst sleeping outside of a cot, please be careful! A child wearing a sleeping bag and not confined to a cot is at a higher risk of falling and being injured. The child must be actively supervised and the sleeping bag removed as soon as the child wakes. You may wish to switch to a sleep suit at this age to allow for leg freedom. Use an age appropriate sleeping bag or sleep suit — [see our recommendations for toddlers](#).

For more information on cot-to-bed safety, visit [Red Nose](#).

While moving from cot to bed is an exciting milestone in a child's life, it can also be unsettling for some children. It's therefore important to be patient and emotionally supportive during the adjustment phase.

On the other hand, you may find some children revel in their new-found independence and will get out of bed, just because they can!

Settling strategies

Settling your toddler if they are in a cot

Preparing the toddler for sleep is so important. An energetic toddler is not skilled at calming so take your toddler somewhere away from the stimulation to help them calm.

Role playing is another great way to help a toddler settle in for sleep. For example, feeding a doll or teddy, letting them go and have a play outside then telling them it's time for teddy to go to bed. This helps a toddler to feel prepared for their own sleep time.

A quiet area allows a busy toddler to calm as will your calm voice, a book, reduced lighting, a massage and a cuddle. Once calm:

1. Place the toddler into their cot awake or drowsy, quietly say 'night-night' and offer them a gentle touch. If the toddler is calm, not asleep, just walk out of the room and listen.
2. No crying means all is okay however, a loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs, means the toddler is not managing and needs your help.
3. Stay out of sight and offer voice comfort initially by shushing at the door. If the toddler calms, continue the shushing for about 5 to 10 seconds.
4. If the toddler is not calming, then you need to go into the room.
5. Drop your shoulders and stay down low. If you approach the cot from above, the toddler will think they are going to be picked up. Instead, stay down low and place your arms through the cot rails.
6. Place your hand on the mattress and commence patting and continue using your voice and calm shushing. About 20 seconds is enough time to see if the toddler is responding.
7. If they are responding by calming, continue briefly then just leave the room. The idea is to offer the same comforting to the toddler over and over again, until the toddler anticipates your arrival.
8. If the crying recommences when you leave the room, go back in and repeat your steps of mattress patting and shushing.

9. If the toddler is not calming after a further 20 seconds or so and they use a dummy, now is the time to place it in their hand. If the toddler does not use a dummy, try singing quietly.
10. If the toddler becomes distressed and is now taking some time to respond, then leaving them alone may be too challenging for them at this time. If this is the case, pick them up and cuddle them. Once calm but awake, place them back into their cot.
11. If the toddler remains unsettled, you may need to stay beside them. If possible, position a chair near the cot and pat and shush until they are asleep.
12. You may need to do this for a few sleeps until the toddler is able to drift to sleep without assistance.



Settling your toddler in a bed

When settling a toddler into their new bed try to keep it simple and consistent.

1. After quiet time, give them their favourite "friend" or toy and prepare them for sleep by telling them it is nap time in 2 minutes.
2. Preparation and anticipation help a toddler feel secure as does explaining that you will stay with them 'for a while' if they need.
3. Guide the toddler into their bed. If the toddler protests, acknowledge their feelings then add "...it's time for bed now and we can chat about this more after you wake up".

4. Repeat the 'sleep time now' message.
5. If the toddler is calm, say 'night-night', leave the room, then listen. If they remain calm, then you are not needed.
6. If the toddler starts to cry but they remain in bed, try some shushing from the door. If they calm with you shushing from outside the door, just lower your 'shush' and then stop and listen.
7. If the toddler starts to cry again, recommence your shushing from outside the door.
8. If the toddler does not stop crying — remembering a loud forceful cry that continues for more than 3 cry outs requires attention — it's time to go into the room. They will most likely have sprung out of bed to meet you!
9. Try to hold the toddler's hand and guide them back to bed. If hand holding is inadequate, pick up the toddler and take them back to bed. Settle them and leave the room saying, "I will be back in a moment".
10. Keep returning the toddler to their bed if they follow you out.
11. Stay a little longer each time to settle them with shushing and mattress patting. Only when they are calm, leave the room. And return as you have said you will.

12. If the toddler is not calming after about 20 seconds or so and they use a dummy, now is the time to introduce it to the settling process.
13. If the toddler does not use a dummy, try some quiet singing. Singing is a very powerful way to calm the brain.
14. If the toddler is not calming, they need additional support. Sit and stay with them but try not to interact too much.
15. Should the toddler become angry with you then it is time to leave the room momentarily. Then return and sit again.
16. Reassure the toddler you are there for them. Sometimes by reading a magazine — although this is difficult in the dark — helps the toddler calm and see that you are there, but not interacting.
17. If the toddler is not calming, prepare to sit with them for the first few sleeps until they fall asleep. Then progressively move the chair away from the bed with each sleep.

Over time, the toddler will learn to trust that you will be there if they need help to settle to sleep.

Key things to remember...

- Parents need to be aware of sleep regressions/brain progressions as being normal and manage these to always ensure safe sleep and settling practices.
- Remember there are no bad or naughty toddlers, they are simply responding to the world around them in the best way they know how. They need us as parents to help and support them in a loving way, and to provide them as often as possible, a little freedom to make their own decisions and complete tasks independently.
- It's also important to remember that every child is different, so be guided by your individual toddler!
- Be kind to yourself as a parent and seek help and assistance where needed!



Products you might like to try...



Sleep Suit Bag

The Sleep Suit Bag is the perfect next step from a sleeping bag as it can be used as a sleeping bag, or converted to a sleep suit using the leg zippers once a toddler is showing signs of walking and climbing. Suitable for ages 3M–6Y.



Sleep Onesie

An excellent alternative to the Sleep Suit Bag, the Sleep Onesie provides leg freedom and is a great option for toilet training toddlers, due to its unique three way zip. Suitable for ages 6M–12Y.



Doll Sleeping Bag

The perfect role play tool, the Doll Sleeping Bag can be incorporated into bedtime or playtime to promote positive sleep associations, routine learning and sleep cues through pretend play.



Window Blockout

This is the perfect solution for babies and toddlers who need total darkness in their room to sleep and dream the night away. A completely dark room during sleep will help stimulate melatonin production, be comforting for your baby, and help prevent early waking or late settling during summer and daylight saving.

Next up... Our 2–5 Year Guide will be released on 12/5/2021

Written for ergoPouch by Cindy Davenport, Clinical Director [Safe Sleep Space](#). This content is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. If all you think about all day is baby sleep or the struggles of parenting, then it is definitely time to chat about it. Our telephone consultation service is very popular and produces amazing results. Our calls are delivered by qualified health professionals who can offer recommendations to help address your sleep and settling concerns. Phone consultations are available Australia wide or internationally via phone or Skype. [Book online now](#) or call us on 1300 775 337.