



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Toddler Sleep

Bedtime can be challenging for parents of toddlers. Toddlers are active, independent, and full of imagination. Night-time fears are common at this age.

Building a healthy bedtime routine

A simple bedtime routine helps children feel calm and ready for sleep. Repeat the same steps every night. This teaches children what to expect.

Try to limit screens before bed. The light from screens can make it harder for the brain to know it is time to sleep. Shows and videos can also keep toddler brains active, right when they need to calm down.

A **calming routine** might include a bath, pajamas, a story, and a cuddle. Give children some notice before bedtime to help them change from one activity to the next. You can also turn the lights low and keep your voice quiet. These are all signs that it is time to rest.

What about toddler naps?

Naps are still helpful for many toddlers, but timing matters. If a nap is pushing bedtime too late, try making it shorter or moving it earlier in the day. There is no need for your toddler to move into a “big-kid bed” until they are climbing out of their crib or you need it for another baby.

The start of fears

Fear of the dark is very common in toddlers. Around age 2, children's imaginations grow fast. But they cannot yet tell what is real and what is pretend. This can make nighttime feel scary. Changes like a new baby, a new caregiver, or a move can also bring up more fears.



Stay calm and patient. This sends a quiet message that everything is okay. Name the fear instead of brushing it off. This helps children feel heard. You might say, "I know the shadows feel scary for you." A favorite stuffed animal can become a special protector at bedtime. Helping your child manage fears is what helps most over time.

Night wakings

When a child wakes at night, give them brief comfort. Try not to talk much, if at all. Help them settle down again. You can offer a pat on the back to help them feel safe. The less you interact, the better. Over time, doing a little less each night helps children learn to settle on their own.

A final thought

If your child's current sleep habits are not working for your family, **it is never too late to try a new way.** Night-time fears and sleep problems are a normal part of growing up. Most children move through this phase with time and loving support. Staying patient and steady are the most helpful things a caregiver can do.

Have more questions?

Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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