



Baby Sleep 101
Help Your Child Sleep Better

SLEEP SOLUTIONS FOR TODDLERS + PRESCHOOLERS

EASY TIPS FOR THE EXHAUSTED PARENT

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Sleep Solutions: From Sleepless to Sleep Success

Have you ever heard the term “Terrible Twos?” or, how about the “Threenager Threes”? These terms semi-jokingly refer to the attitudes our formerly sweet children display during the toddler and preschooler years.

You may be thinking they are a cute term, but I’m here to tell you that they are more than that. They are real changes our kids go through. I’ve not only witnessed this with all the families I’ve helped, but with my own two children as well!

For those of you that don’t know me-Hi! I’m Joleen!

I’m a former elementary teacher that thought getting a baby to sleep would be easy-until I actually had one.

I struggled for over a year to get my daughter to sleep better. It was stressful, depressing and isolating. She had constant short naps, night wakings and early morning wakings-you name it, I experienced it. Our situation felt so hopeless that at one point, both my husband and I felt like we didn’t think we could do this again.

Being a teacher, I LOVED kids, so contemplating not having any more children was a wake-up call to me that our situation was getting desperate.

After trying advice from friends, online forums, sleep books and magic beans (only half kidding), I found a solution, and my life was transformed.

It lit a passion in me to help other families to not struggle the way I had. I studied with one of the leading child-sleep institutes in North America, and I became certified as a Pediatric Sleep Consultant. I have now been helping families around the world for over six years, have appeared on various media outlets as a featured guest, am the Western Canadian Representative for the International Association for Child Sleep Consultants and mentor new consultants as they are entering the field.

So, fast-forward to once I was a sleep consultant and my daughter was a toddler. I thought our sleep problems had been solved.

Nope!

Apparently being a sleep consultant doesn’t make you immune from having a limit-testing toddler. At the age of three, she decided to start climbing out of her crib and her sleep (or, lack thereof) spun out of control!

There were nights when I got less sleep with her as a three year old, than as a three month old! I got to test my knowledge getting, and keeping her back on track once again

The good news?

When my second child entered the same toddler-testing years, I took the preventative steps necessary and didn't have ANY sleep problems with him.

The even better news?

Since I've experienced these challenges first-hand, I know how it feels, all the worries we take going into trying to solve the issues. I know how easy it can be to just let our toddlers climb in bed with us because we are So. Freakin'. Tired. I've been there, and I came out the other side. And I can help you as well.

While many of the struggles people refer to as the Terrible Twos/Threenager Threes are brought on by our kiddos starting to seek their independence, I have found many behavior challenges are propelled by something else that's not talked about in mom's groups.

Lack of sleep.

Somewhere between ages of three to five, children will drop their final nap. It is also a common time for children to start to go to bed a bit later. Seems harmless, right? But, overtime; even an hour less of sleep each day begins to add up, and our kids become sleep deprived. When children are tired, they are more cranky, temperamental and emotional. (Hmmm...maybe you can relate to that as well? ;)) And, because of the biochemical changes that happen when young kids are tired, they actually resist sleep even more and have bigger tantrums, than if they were well-rested.

None of us are at our best when we're tired, but for those tiny humans who lack self-control that you or I might have, they have a hard time regulating themselves. What we're left with is a big ol' pile of tears, snot, and loud shouts of "NO". As you have likely already experienced, or are about to experience, your child will begin to enter into a phase of;

- Fighting/resisting their nap,
- Epic bedtime battles,
- Night wakings, crying, demanding the sun, the moon and the stars and ultimately ending up in your bed
- All of the above #perfectstorm

But the great news is that while it's normal for toddlers to want control and independence, there are many ways that we can honour that, while still respectfully and lovingly maintaining healthy sleep habits. Similar to how a well-balanced natural diet is essential for your child's developing body; healthy sleep is essential for your child's developing brain. Your child wants to sleep, and they want to sleep well, but we need to help lay the foundation and teach them the skills. Ready to have the tools in place to lay that strong foundation? I'm ready to help you!

Let's dive in to the five most common toddler sleep problems and how to fix them so you can move from sleepless, to sleep success!

To your child's sleep,

Joleen Dilk Salyn

Your Certified Pediatric
Sleep Consultant

www.babysleep101.com



Toddler Sleep Issue 1: Bedtime is Taking Too Long

Does this sound familiar?

Bedtime rolls around and you try to get your child to sleep. What should be a thirty minute event, lasts close to an hour to just get them into the room. Once in bed, your child takes close to another hour to fall asleep.

What is going on?

Having an extended bedtime can be brought on by several reasons. So first we need to determine which one is contributing to your situation.

A child can take a long time to fall asleep at bedtime if they are;

- a) Over-tired
- b) Under-tired

Let's take a look at each.

A) Over-tired

When a child becomes over-tired, what is really happening is that they are sleep deprived and they have what is called a "sleep debt."

This means their body is missing the required amount of sleep that it needs.

Sleep debts can be thought of like a financial debt. If our bank account is missing \$1000, it has a debt, or is -\$1000. If a child has had poor sleep for a few nights, weeks, months or years, a decent nap, or a solid sleep the next night, may only bring their body a tiny bit out of the debt.

It is similar to if we deposited \$200 into the bank account; it helps, but it still doesn't bring us into the clear.

Second, when their body is in the sleep debt state, to compensate, their bodies will go into overdrive to try and fight the fatigue. Two stimulating hormones are released into the bloodstream to accomplish this; adrenaline and cortisol.

As a result, in theory, your child should be tired, but yet is hyper, running around and doesn't look ready for bed.

5 common places that cause sleep debts are:

- A morning wake up time that is too early
- A nap that is too early
- A nap that is too short
- A bedtime that is too late
- Multiple night wakings

B) Under-tired

Because parenting isn't hard enough already, a completely opposite reason can also produce a child that is energetic at bedtime and that is if the child is under-tired. This simply means that they aren't quite ready for bed yet. They haven't had enough time for what is called "sleep pressure", to accumulate. Some people refer to it as a child that hasn't had enough wake time before bed. However, many times, in this scenario, the child is content to go to bed, but will lie awake for a long time. We don't usually see the hyper, over-stimulated activity in this situation that presents when they are over-tired.

3 Common reasons under-tiredness occurs are from

- A nap that is too long
- A nap that is too late
- A day that is too short

Solution

Over-Tired

If you believe your child is over-tired, then the fastest and best way to correct it, is to get more sleep into their sleep bank. To do this;

1st) Determine how much sleep they need to be getting in a 24 hour period for their age.

2nd) Determine their actual sleep intake.

To determine this second number, it is best to document for 5-7 days as that helps to give a more accurate picture, rather than after one day. Once you have this important information, you can determine if they need a later wake up time, a later nap, a longer nap, an earlier bedtime, a more solid night sleep, or a combination of all five. If you have a child that is no longer napping (if under the age of three, your child still likely requires a nap, so if they aren't, you may want to consider re-instating it), then the solution for over-tiredness is often found in the timing of bedtime.

Under-Tired

If you feel your child is under-tired, then the solution is usually found in tweaking and changing your child's sleep times. Similar to the solution for over-tiredness, always start with determining how much sleep your child needs for their age and then document their average sleep intake in a 24 hour period. With this information, you may find that you need to slightly reduce your child's nap length, or move the start time a bit earlier. Rarely, but sometimes, bedtime is actually too early. This is not an option I would recommend you start with though, as it can produce night wakings and create a sleep debt unless you are 100% sure your child needs a later bedtime.

Toddler Sleep Issue 2: Toddler is Tired, But Can't Sleep

Sometimes our little ones are perfectly ready for bed. We've made sure their tummies are full, they've went to the washroom, brushed their teeth and have had their bath.

They aren't over or under-tired, just *ready*.

However, they aren't able to fall asleep. What causes this?

Frequently, the problem can be attributed to the room environment. A room that is too hot or cold, too noisy or too stimulating can be enough of a distraction that prevents them from falling asleep.

Solution

Temperature

Create a soothing sleep environment that is conducive to sleep. This includes having the room set at a perfect temperature so as to mimic the natural response the body provides when it sleeps.

Light

As cute as some of the nightlights are, extra light can suppress your child's natural sleep hormones (melatonin) from being released into the bloodstream. This makes it hard for your child to fall asleep, and hard for you to enjoy a quiet evening with your feet up. ;)

This also includes eliminating any light coming from the window, especially when the sun is up later in the summer evenings. You can use anything to block the light such as garbage bags or a sheet, however, investing in black-out blinds provides a high level of darkness and convenience when you want to open them in the morning.

Noise

Finally, reduce any outside noise that your child may find jarring by employing a high quality sound machine. You want to invest in a good quality one so that you are playing the right frequencies at the correct decibels to safe-guard your child's hearing.

Always place the unit as far from your child as possible and as close to the door or any shared walls, as possible.

Toddler Sleep Issue 3: Toddler is Refusing to Nap

I know society tends to think kids don't need a nap after the age of two, but I'm here to tell you different.

They do. Many kids, with the right circumstances will continue to take a nap, even a short one, until they enter full-day school.

Surprised?

It's true. Naps are needed for a lot longer than most of us think. Especially if you're seeing behavior issues, temper tantrums, meltdowns and night wakings. However, given their age and the natural development to asserting themselves, sometimes toddlers put up such a huge fight at naptime, that it can seem like they don't need the nap anymore. There are three reasons for this;

- They are too over-stimulated
- They are being put down at the wrong times.
- There aren't firm limits and structure in place

Solution

Over-stimulated

For the over-stimulated child, have a soothing wind down routine in place five or ten minutes before you want to be leaving their room. Have a short, repeatable series of steps that allows you and your child to spend quiet time together and allows them to begin to relax and unwind. Keep the lights low, and only do activities that are relaxing and unstimulating.

Sleeping at the Wrong Times

If your child is being napped at the wrong time or different times each day, it goes against their internal body clock, which is called their circadian rhythm. If you want an inkling of what that feels like, think about trying to sleep during the day and stay up at night (if you're a shift worker, then you understand even more). It can be done, but it goes against the natural sleep rhythms of the body. The sleep that happens at the wrong times of the day, is not as restorative as sleep that happens at the right times.

To solve this, keep the nap time consistent each day. This helps with planning for bedtime, but it also helps to regulate the morning wake up, over time. It's also important that the nap isn't happening too early or too late. Aim for a solid nap around mid-day/early afternoon.

Toddler Issue 4:

Coming Out of the Room

We have all seen or heard about a toddler that sneaks (or maybe blatantly) comes out of the room when they should be sleeping.

It may be at bedtime, during the night, or in the wee hours of the morning. Whenever it occurs, it can be frustrating and downright exhausting to deal with.

This is one of the main reasons that parents end up doing things they don't really want to do like allowing the child into their bed or, sleeping in the child's room.

Our own exhaustion over takes us.

If you have a child that is resisting bedtime, stalling, coming out their room a million times; you are not alone! This is such common problem, but, the good news is that this is an easy fix.

Solution

A child that is testing limits needs one thing; limits! However, we get so tired, that we wonder if the battle is worth it each day.

It is!

I have had many clients see amazing results with their child's naps once we implemented structure and limits around sleep periods.

It is difficult for your toddler to settle down when they are constantly coming out the room, running around, playing with toys in the room, yelling, singing, etc.

To reduce this, with love and respect, involve your child in setting up sleep rules. Keep this process fun and upbeat-it shouldn't feel like a punishment. To help convey the message that this is a team effort, Mom and Dad should make their own sleep rules, too!

But the most important part of this process though, is the follow up.

It is essential to have consequences the next day if the child doesn't follow them. And they need to be the right type of consequence.

Since I had previously been a teacher, my education had very little in the way of how to manage students' behavior. But when it did, the instructors were very much focused on control,

bribes/rewards, and punishment. These tactics never felt right to me and I was fortunate to have wonderful mentors that helped me develop a better way to go about keeping students on track

Once I began my career as a sleep consultant, my training included working with some amazing child behavior specialists and helped me to further move away from the bribe/reward cycle.

But it can be tough to change that mindset at first! The use of bribes, rewards or manipulation (“if you don’t go to bed, you won’t be able to watch TV tomorrow!”), is predominant in our culture.

So how do we help our children to make right decisions?

By having consequences that are directly related to the behavior and teach, rather than punish. If you don’t, it won’t make sense to them and you will continue to have issues at bedtime.

For example, if your child comes out of their room multiple times at bedtime after having sleep rules set up, it wouldn’t make sense to take away their TV time or their favorite stuffed animal, the next day. That is a punishment that has no relation to their decision to come out.

Punishments tend to make a child shut down and become defensive. Consequences, on the other hand, ones that are relatable to the misbehavior and are given with respect; eliminate power struggles and keep a child open and receptive to learning from the mistake.



Toddler Issue 5:

Night Wakings

So maybe you don't have any issues with your child falling asleep or coming out of their room. Maybe the challenge is night wakings.

Even if it's one time, that's one too many when both you and your child are tired. What can tired parents do then, to help their child sleep through the night?

There are several reasons why kids wake at night-each with separate solutions. They are;

- Sleep associations
- Habitual wakings
- Night terrors
- Nightmares
- Sleep disordered breathing

Sleep Associations

A sleep association is anything that your child relies on to fall asleep. As your child enters the first stage of sleep, they come to depend on or "associate" falling asleep with certain environments or items. Common sleep associations are soothers, needing a parent present or co-sleeping.

These associations can become heavily relied on over the months or years, but the great news is that your child can learn how to fall asleep without them. In fact, learning this valuable skill greatly improves their sleep and overall health.

Habitual Wakings

Habitual night wakings can closely be related to sleep associations, but the difference is that with habitual night wakings, the wake up tends to be around the same time each night. And often, the child needs less (but still some) intervention than a waking due to a sleep association, to get back to sleep.

Night Terrors

These wakings can be quite scary for a parent when they happen. Your child will appear to be awake as their eyes are open and they may be yelling, screaming or thrashing. They won't respond to your attempts to talk or soothe them until they all of a sudden "snap" out of it and look at you, confused. Technically, with a night terror (or often, its lesser-known cousin; a Confusional Event) part of the child's brain is still asleep, even though their eyes may be open.

When a child comes out of these wakings, they have no memory of the event. It can seem similar to a nightmare, but it isn't. Night terrors happen during NREM sleep, often within four hours after the child falls asleep and no dreaming is occurring.

Nightmares

Nightmares, often confused with the previous night terrors, differ from a night terror in a few ways. First, the brain is in the REM stages of sleep. This is where dreaming occurs. Second, nightmares usually happen a little later in the night. And third, the child will have a memory or an impression of what woke them up. The nightmare is what wakes them up, whereas during night terror, unless a child is woken up by their parent, they may settle down as the brain proceeds to the next stage of sleep.

Sleep-Disordered Breathing

Sleep-disordered breathing (SDB) is the catch-all general term given to breathing difficulties during sleep. If this happens, the body perceives the disruption in your child's breathing as a choking event. As a result, blood pressure rises, the heart rate slows, oxygen levels in the blood can drop, the brain is aroused and your child wakes up.

It may seem cute to hear your child snore, but if they are doing it when they aren't sick, it is a warning sign that there may be an underlying medical issue causing your child's night wakings. SDB can range from noisy breathing, snoring to Obstructive Sleep Apnea which can involve choking and gasping. As your child's sleep is continuously disrupted from night to night, this creates a sleep debt. You or child's caregiver may notice that your child is sleepy or irritable during the day or, hyper and unable to concentrate.

Another lesser known fact is that children with SDB frequently have bed-wetting issues, past the common age of potty training.

SDB can be caused from a variety of areas around the mouth and throat. Namely; enlarged tonsils or adenoids, fatty deposits around the neck, or a narrowing of the jaw due to a unreleased tongue tie or other factor.

Solution

Sleep Associations

When a child has come to depend on a certain environment or condition in order to fall asleep, the way to undo that is with sleep training or weaning of the association.

There are many methods to choose from, each with its own timeline as well as pros and cons. Pick a method that feels right for you and your timeline that you would like to see changes. For example, don't pick a gradual (sometimes referred to as "gentle") method if you are expecting to see changes within a few days. That's unfair to both you and your child.

It's also essential that your child is following an appropriate and well-timed daytime routine, so that sleep training can be efficient and effective. With having the right schedule and method in place, your child will be able to start sleeping through the night in no time!

Habitual Wakings

The solution for these wakings depends on how you are currently responding. If your response is to quickly help the child back to sleep, be it re-tucking their blanket in, offering a sip of water, finding their lovey, then the solution is to use a gradual weaning method as well as delaying the time you enter the room.

If, however, you find that most of the time your child is putting themselves back to sleep without your help, then to eliminate these wakings altogether, examining their daytime routine may be the answer. Wakings that consistently happen before midnight and often within the first four to five hours after they fall asleep, or somewhere between 4-5am, are often a signal that a sleep debt has formed or bedtime is too late. Tweaking their routine so that they aren't over-tired can give everyone a solid night's sleep.

Night Terrors

Night terrors or confusional events in young children are most often linked to either a child that is too warm or, a child that is over-tired.

Both of these therefore are easily remedied!

If the room is too warm, cool it down to a temperature more suitable for sleep. Surprisingly, we ALL sleep better in a cool room-even in winter!

And if your child is over-tired, making sure naps are well-timed with their circadian sleep clock, are an appropriate length and that bedtime is age appropriate, will all help to reduce the night terrors.

Nightmares

Wakings caused from nightmares are a common worry among my clients. But the good news is that these don't happen as often as thought. It is much more common for me to see night wakings caused from sleep debts and over-tiredness than an honest-to-goodness nightmare.

However, that's not to say they don't happen. Usually between the ages of 3-6 years of age, the incidences of nightmares peak and can be brought on by a number of things. Simply just growing up and being aware that negative or scary things exist can be one reason, along with anxiety, worry, or dealing with any stress or change such as starting school, new sibling or an overactive imagination.

When they do happen, reassure your child that the dream wasn't real. But be careful to not dismiss their fears-it felt real to them. If they are very upset, help them to re-write the dream and give it a funny or silly ending.

Also monitor and limit the amount of TV your child is watching-especially before a sleep period.

Because sometimes one bad dream leads to a child using that as an excuse to get the parent to stay in the room for many nights after, teach them tools to help them to fall asleep by themselves. Any sort of imagination or relaxation techniques, can be helpful.

Conclusion

So there you have it!

The top five most common sleep issues that toddlers and preschoolers face with easy steps you can take to have a calm and relaxing nap, bed or night time with your child.

Remember that sleep is the same as food; your child requires generous amounts of each. Without them, their health is compromised, so don't let anyone deter you from reaching your goals.

You can do this and your CHILD can do this!

By implementing these tools and techniques, you are giving your child one of the greatest gifts you can give; the gift of sleep.

If, after implementing these suggestions you have a few questions, feel free to book an A La Carte service call. I offer 30 or 60 minute calls to help give you more advice where needed. This short and simple option is for those of you that just have a few questions or want to review the current situation. I will analyze sleep logs and offer you further tips on how to move forward. You can check them out [here](#).

Be sure to hop on over to the [Baby Sleep 101 Facebook page](#) as well, where I offer even more advice and tips each week.

Sweet dreams and solid sleep!

Joleen Dilk Salyn

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