



Early Childhood Knowledge and Learning Center

Building Healthy and Safe Sleep Routines

headstart.gov/physical-health/article/building-healthy-safe-sleep-routines

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Sleep helps the brain and body grow and develop. Children who get enough sleep have the energy to take part in learning activities, focus and pay attention, and manage their emotions. Most children benefit from scheduled periods of rest. A rest could be a nap, quiet time, or a calm break between activities. Sleep and rest routines are important for healthy child development.

The ideal sleeping environment is safe, quiet, comfortable, and mainly used for sleep. It's somewhere a child's sleep will be interrupted as little as possible.

How much sleep children need changes as they grow. Infants do not have regular sleep patterns until they are about 6 months old. Newborns sleep around 16 to 17 hours a day, but they may sleep only one or two hours at a time.

Young children get their sleep during naptime and bedtime. The recommendations here are based on age, for a 24-hour period. Individual children's needs and patterns may be different.

Recommended hours of sleep for ages:

Age Group	Total Number of Sleep Hours in 24 Hours (Including naps)
Infants (4–12 months)	12–16 hours
Toddlers (1–3 years old)	11–14 hours
Preschoolers (3–5 years old)	10–13 hours

Safe Sleep Practices

For Infants

Caution About Sleep Aids

Sleep aids are generally not recommended for young children. Before using any sleep medications or supplements such as [melatonin](#), speak with a licensed health care provider. Supplements have not been carefully studied, and their long-term effects are not well understood.

Always follow [medication administration policies](#) and procedures for prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and supplements.

Always put babies to sleep on their back for naps and at night until age 1. A safe sleep area can help reduce the risk of [sudden infant death syndrome](#) (SIDS) and other sleep-related deaths, such as accidental suffocation.

Remove loose bedding and all soft objects, including stuffed animals, from the sleeping area.

Infants should sleep in a crib, bassinet, portable crib, or portable play yard with a fitted sheet.

Sleeping equipment should meet current Consumer Product Safety Commission standards. See [these resources on sleep](#) for more information.

For Toddlers and Preschoolers

When a child is tall enough or mobile enough to possibly climb out of a crib, it's time to move them to a safer sleeping environment such as a bed, mat, or cot.

Use guard rails, a toddler bed, or a mattress on the floor until the child is used to sleeping in a bed. This protects children from falls.

If the crib or bed is near a window, make sure the drawstrings that open or close blinds or curtains are always out of reach. Drawstrings can strangle children.

Weighted Sleep Products

- Do not use weighted products with children under the age of 3 or with a child of any age who cannot remove the weighted product by themselves. Weighted blankets, swaddles, sleep sacks, and stuffed animals may restrict breathing and suffocate children.

- For children over the age of 3:
 - Only use weighted sleep products if caregivers bring them in and a licensed health care provider has specifically recommended them.
 - Do not use weighted sleep products unless an adult closely supervises the child. Look for signs of overheating (e.g., sweating, crying, flushed or red skin) and stop using the weighted product if you see any of these signs.
- Never use weighted sleep products as restraints. A child should always be able to remove a weighted sleep product by themselves.

Building a Sleep Routine

The key to successful sleep routines is consistency. Routines are great for children and families. When starting a new sleep routine, it may take a while for everyone to get used to it. Share these bedtime routine tips with families:

- Follow a schedule for naps and rest.
- Set a regular bedtime, including on weekends.
- [Turn off screens](#) at least an hour before bedtime. This includes the TV, video games, phones, etc. These make it harder for your child to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- [Limit drinks, except water](#). Avoid beverages high in sugar or caffeine, such as juice, tea, and soft drinks, before sleep.
- Start a child's sleep routine about 30–60 minutes before they go to bed. This allows a child to know it's time for bed.
- Include quiet time during the bedtime routine to talk about your child's day, [read a book](#), or listen to soft music.
- [Brush teeth before sleep](#).
- Limit indoor lights as bedtime approaches.
- Make the room [65–68 F](#) if possible. A cooler room makes it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.