

Tips for a healthy sleep (18-24 months)

Toddlers and sleep

At 2 years old, your toddler is curious, energetic, and full of personality, and they still need plenty of sleep to fuel their growth and development. This age can bring new sleep challenges, from bedtime battles to nighttime waking. Every toddler is different. Some are great sleepers; others need a little more help.

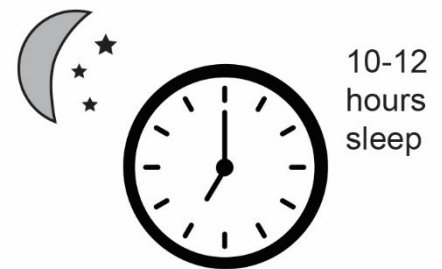
If you're finding your toddlers sleep difficult, you're not alone, sleep issues are very common in early childhood, and many families go through the same thing.

Every family is different and there are many approaches to helping your toddler to sleep better even those toddlers who may have other difficulties.

Warmth and consistency are the key!

How much sleep does my baby need?

- **Night sleep:** 10 - 12 hours
- **Day sleep:** Usually 1 nap during the day of 1-2 hours
- **Total sleep:** 11 - 14 hours in a 24 hour period



8 Sleeping tips for babies: SLEPPSS*

Although it might feel like a bumpy ride at times, the **SLEPPSS*** approach outlined below provides a good foundation for healthy sleeping for all babies.

** SLEPPSS has been developed by Dr D. Goel, PCH Consultant in consultation with Sleep specialists, Neonatal specialists, Community Health and consumers*

¹Set a bedtime routine

- Set a consistent, calming routine, which can include bath, brush teeth, book, cuddle and then bed, to help your toddler recognise when it's time for bedtime.



2 Lock in bedtime and wake time

- Having a regular routine helps toddlers feel safe and sleep better. Set a regular bedtime, which suits your family. Aim for bedtime between 6.30pm - 8.00pm.
- Aim for a consistent wake-up time.

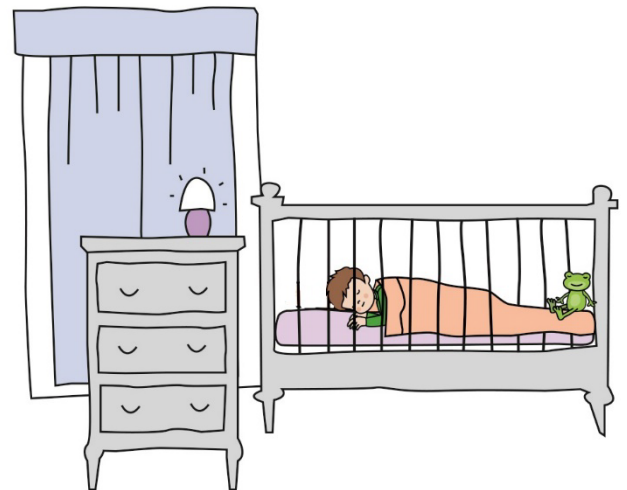


3 Encourage and empower choices, not control

- Toddlers love independence. Let them choose between two pyjamas, or between two age-appropriate bedtime books, but stick to the routine.

4 Ensure safe sleep

- Quiet, low light room
- Familiar sleep items (blanket, teddy)
- Keep cot or bed free of distractions (no toys, bright lights or, pillows if in cot)
- A nightlight can be helpful for toddlers who are afraid of the dark.
- Avoid screens and active play 1 hour before bed.



5 Peaceful night time responses and positive reinforcement

- Praise your toddler for going to bed calmly and staying in bed during the night. You can reward good sleep behaviour with praise or a small reward, like a sticker or liked activity.

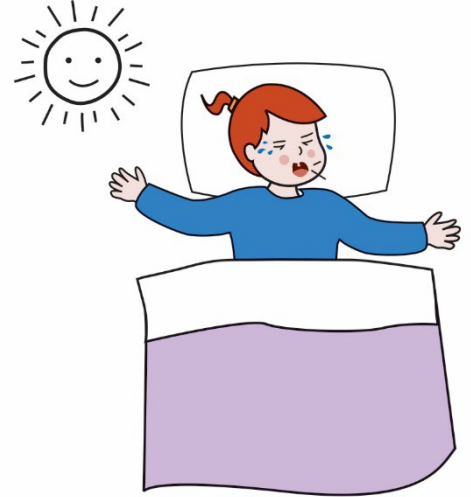
6 Prevent delay tactics

- Prevent delay tactics by keeping firm boundaries but stay calm. Keep it short and kind. Offer one drink, one hug, one story - then lights out.



7 Spot sleepy signs: avoid overtiredness

- Look for sleepy signs: rubbing eyes, yawning, losing interest in play. Overtired toddlers can become irritable and struggle to fall asleep.



8 Stay patient and consistent

- Sleep issues may take time to resolve. It's important to remain calm, consistent, and patient as your toddler adjusts to healthy sleep habits.
- If you are co-parenting, **share your bedtime routines and strategies** with the other parent or caregivers so your toddler has consistency.

Common behavioural sleep issues in toddlers

Separation anxiety

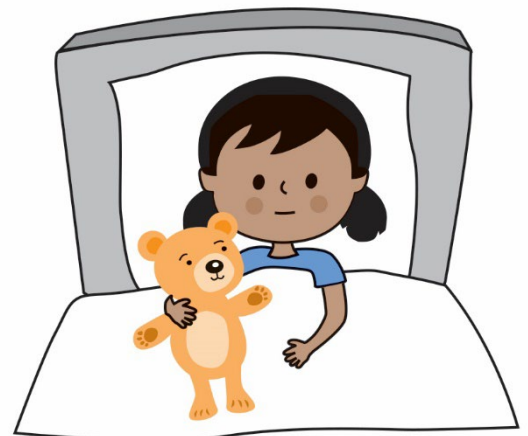
Many 2-year-olds experience separation anxiety, especially around bedtime. They may resist going to bed or cry when separated from parents or caregivers.

Signs to watch for:

- Crying or clinging when it's time to sleep
- Saying "I don't want to sleep" or "Don't leave me"
- Waking up and coming to your room during the night

What to do:

- Reassure your toddler with a consistent bedtime routine (for example a favourite age-appropriate book, soft music, or a gentle cuddle before bed).
- Offer a comfort object like a favourite blanket or stuffed animal.
- Be patient and calm when your toddler expresses distress, but avoid giving in to demands like staying in the room until they fall asleep.



Night wakings

Many 2-year-olds wake up during the night and may call for their parents. This can be due to nightmares, wanting comfort, or not having developed the skills to self-soothe back to sleep.

Signs to watch for:

- Waking up several times during the night
- Crying or calling for parents after being put to bed

What to do:

- Determine the reason for the calling out. If calling out is due to:

- **Nightmares:**

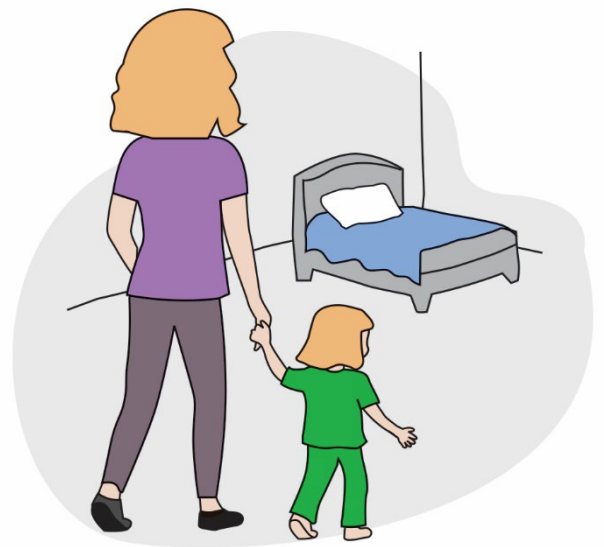
Stay calm and keep interactions minimal when your toddler wakes up at night. Walk them back to their bed with little or no conversation.

- **Self-settling:**

Consider a “gentle return” method where you comfort your toddler without picking them up, then gradually reduce your presence over time.

Teaching toddler to self-settle at the start of the night helps them to be able to self-settle through the night. Build a consistent habit of going to sleep in the place where your toddler will sleep for the night. It is best if this is their own bed.

- Remember to praise your toddler for successfully staying in their own bed all night, use reward system keeping the rewards small and frequent. Stickers often work well.
- Avoid bringing your toddler to your bed unless necessary, as this can reinforce the habit of waking up and seeking parental presence.



Resisting bedtime (stalling or procrastination)

Toddlers may delay bedtime with behaviours like asking for a drink, another story, or insisting they're not tired. They are exploring their independence and seeking control.

Signs to watch for:

- Asking for multiple stories, drinks, or bathroom trips.
- Complaining of being "not tired" or "not sleepy".
- Becoming increasingly active or hyperactive as bedtime approaches.

What to do:

- Establish and stick to a predictable bedtime routine. Let your toddler know what comes next, such as "After story time, we'll say goodnight."
- Set clear and calm limits, such as, "We'll read one story, and then it's time to sleep."
- Avoid giving in to demands for extra attention. If you go back in to comfort them, keep it brief and consistent.

Nightmares and night terrors

Around the age of 2 years, toddlers begin to have more vivid dreams, and this may lead to nightmares. Nightmares can be distressing, and content can be described. Night terrors, which are different, can cause your toddler to appear terrified or scream while still asleep with no memory of the episode.

Signs to watch for:

- Crying or screaming during sleep, appearing scared or upset upon waking.
- Acting frightened or talking about "bad dreams".

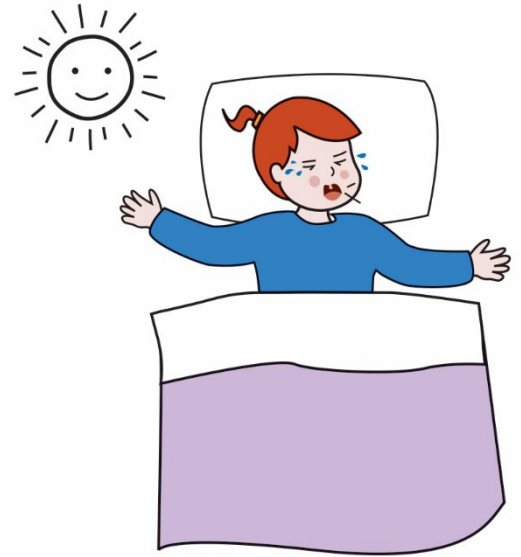
What to do:

- Comfort your toddler if they wake up frightened after a nightmare.
- For night terrors, it's important not to wake your toddler during the event. Simply ensure they're safe and wait for the episode to pass (they usually last only a few minutes). It is often best not to discuss them with your toddler as this may lead to anxiety. Overtiredness can make night terrors worse.
- Where a nightmare is suspected, offer extra reassurance during the day, and maintain a calm, comforting nighttime routine to reduce fears.



Transitioning from naps

Most toddlers still have an afternoon nap until 3 years of age, however around age 2 years, some toddlers may begin to drop or resist their afternoon nap. This can result in overtiredness and difficulty falling asleep at night.



Signs to watch for:

- Refusing naps or struggling to fall asleep during nap time.
- Becoming cranky or irritable in the late afternoon or evening.

What to do:

- If your toddler still needs a nap, ensure it is happening at the same time each day and not too late in the afternoon.
- If your toddler is dropping their nap, you might need to adjust bedtime earlier to account for the lost daytime sleep.
- Watch for signs of tiredness in the early afternoon and try to encourage quiet time even if your toddler doesn't sleep.

Signs of a medical sleep issue

Most toddler sleep problems are about behaviour. But sometimes they can be caused by health issues. Talk to your doctor if your toddler:

- snores loudly most nights.
- has pauses in breathing: Stops breathing for short moments or gasps while sleeping.
- sweats excessively, wakes often, or moves around a lot in sleep.
- mouth breathes: breathes through their mouth, drools a lot, or often has a blocked nose or tonsil problems.
- is consistently overtired, cranky, or struggles to pay attention during the day.

Doctors use a checklist called **BEARS** to ask about your child's sleep. The table on the following page shows what each letter in BEARS means and gives examples of whether something could be a medical problem or behavioural.



BEARS checklist	Could be a medical problem?	Could be behavioural problem?
B edtime problems – does your toddler have any problems going to bed	Yes	Yes. SLEPPSS* can help
E xcessive daytime sleepiness. Does your toddler seem overtired or sleepy a lot during the day?	Yes	Yes. SLEPPSS* can help
A wakenings during the night. Does your toddler wake a lot at night?	Yes	Yes. SLEPPSS* can help
R egularity and duration of sleep. Does your toddler have a regular bedtime and wak time? What are they?	Doctor needs informaiton to see if toddler is getting enough sleep	Yes. If irregular bed and wak up time. SLEPPSS* can help
S leep-disordered breathing. Does your toddler snore a lot or have difficulty breathing at night?	Yes	No behavioural reasons; talk to your doctor

Adopted from Owens JA, Dalzell V. Use of 'BEARS' sleep screening tool in a paediatric residents' continuity clinic: a pilot study. Sleep Med 2005; 6:63

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Seeking additional support

Ngala

Ngala is a Western Australian not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting parents, families, and children through education, parenting programs and child development services.

Ngala has a range of services, programs and resources for sleep and settling. For more visit their website or contact the Parenting Line on 08 9368 9368.



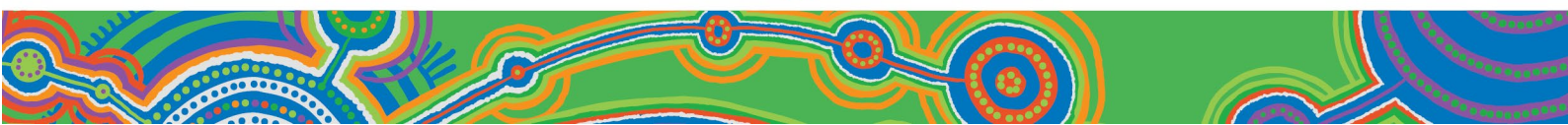
Ngala website

Sleep Health Foundation

The Sleep Health Foundation is a not-for-profit charity focused on raising awareness about the value of sleep, how to improve it and address common sleep disorders. There are plenty of sleep resources on the website.



Sleep Health Foundation



Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)

You can download an article from the Australian Journal of General Practice titled “An approach to common sleep presentations in infants and toddlers” at the QR code and link on the right.



RACGP

Seeking a referral

If you or your GP is concerned about a medical sleep issue, your GP can refer your toddler to:

1. **Perth Children’s Hospital Sleep Clinic** through the Central Sleep Referral system. This clinic can assess your child’s breathing and sleep in more detail.
2. And/or **Perth Children’s Hospital ENT Clinic** through the Central Sleep Referral system. The clinic can assess for airway anomalies as a cause for sleep issues.
3. **Private paediatric sleep physician or ENT surgeon** as suitable based on family preference.



You are not alone

Remember, every child is different. Some are great sleepers; others need a little more help. What matters most is that you and your child are supported and well. You are doing an amazing job.

If you are feeling overwhelmed there are people to help you such as your family and friends, GP, community child health nurse, or Ngala. You can also contact Beyond Blue for support.

If you think you may hurt your child or hurt yourself, get help immediately by contacting Crisis Care (08) 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008.



Beyond Blue



Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service



Child and Adolescent Health Service
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.
Telephone: (08) 6456 2222
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