

A GUIDE TO A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

For parents of babies and toddlers



READY FOR BED

Create a regular, calm bedtime routine from an early age:

- Let your child know when it is going to be bedtime.
- Establish a quiet, relaxed atmosphere with no excitement.
- Brush teeth, have a warm bath and dress in night clothes.
- A bottle or milky drink, turn the lights low and into bed.
- Read a lovely bedtime story.
- A goodnight cuddle and a kiss.

SWEET DREAMS

Children have their own sleeping habits which don't always match yours! Here are some hints and tips to help establish a good night's sleep for all.

OLDER BABIES



Make bedtime fun but be firm and consistent:

- Remove all noisy toys, leaving a favourite cuddly toy.
- Consider using a night light.
- Ensure their favourite comforter is within easy reach; a security blanket, dummy or toy.
- Put your child into bed awake, and follow your nightly routine, for example, a story or lullaby.
- Tuck them in, say 'goodnight' and leave the room, reassuring them that you will be there if they need you.



TEARS AT NIGHT

Young children under five often wake and cry at night. Always react calmly:

- Wait a few minutes to see if they settle back down. If not, check to see if they are comfortable. Are they too hot, cold, wet, or sick, or have they lost their comforter?
- Tuck them in and leave the room without picking them up.
- If they are afraid of the dark or have had a nightmare, leave a dim light on and be reassuring.
- Try not to let your child cry for long periods or get angry at yourself.
- It is not advisable to take your baby out of their cot, to another room or into your bed.
- Avoid giving food or drink, as this becomes habit-forming. (This does not apply if the child is sick.)

SHARING YOUR BED

The safest place for a baby to sleep is in a crib or cot:

- Babies under six months should sleep (day and night) in a room with you.
- It is dangerous to sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.
- It is your decision whether your child joins and stays with you in bed, but it could become a difficult habit to break later.
- Sleeping together is a personal decision. What works for one family, may not work for another.
- Always discuss your options with your partner before you start sleep-sharing.
- Alternatively, you could always carry your child back to their own bed every time they appear in your room.





WAKING AT NIGHT

By the time your child is six months old they can be expected to sleep through most nights, but if they wake:

- Reassure them, check their comfort level and return any lost comforter.
- Kiss goodnight and leave the room.
- If they keep waking, be firm, settle them back down and leave the room.
- Toddlers who keep getting out of bed should be taken back immediately with no verbal communication (no words or smiles.)
- Always be calm and consistent, never angry.
- If your child has a night terror, don't wake them, these are not dangerous and won't be remembered in the morning.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

A consistent bedtime routine is essential as it encourages babies and young children to relax and fall asleep more easily and establishes good sleeping patterns:

- Some children need less or more sleep than others.
- Parents set the time for bed, not children.
- Put your child to bed before they get overtired.
- Children need to fall asleep on their own, in their own cot or bed, not on the sofa.
- Praise your child in the morning after a good night's sleep as this reinforces good sleeping habits.
- Sleeping patterns can be upset by teething, illness, holidays or any changes to the family routine.
- Consistency, patience and a calm, firm attitude are key.



READY FOR BED



If you need additional information or advice, here are some more resources:

- Your own GP or Health Visitor
- The Lullaby Trust; www.lullabytrust.org.uk
- Cry-sis; www.cry-sis.org.uk
- NCT - National Childbirth Trust; www.nct.org.uk
- NHS Choices; www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/caring-for-a-newborn/helping-your-baby-to-sleep/

