



Primary School Children

Sleep Association - Management

Sleeping Sound

Sleep associations occur when your child learns to fall asleep with a certain object or activity. Changing sleep associations is all about teaching your child to fall asleep by themselves, without that object or activity.

Bedtime routine

Establish a consistent bedtime routine that includes calm and enjoyable activities, such as a bath and bedtime stories. Avoid exciting, high-energy activities, such as playing outside, running around, or watching TV or videos just before bed. The activities closest to “lights out” should take place in the room where your child sleeps.

Consistent bedroom environment

Make sure your child’s bedroom environment is the same at bedtime as it is throughout the night (e.g., same lighting, no music if you are not going to have music on all night).

Put your child to bed sleepy but awake

After the bedtime routine, put your child in bed sleepy but awake and leave the room. Remember, the key to having your child sleep through the night is to have them learn to fall asleep on their own, so they can put themselves back to sleep when they naturally wake up during the night.

What happens if my child cries?

If your child cries after leaving the room, you can choose to:

- ignore them completely or
- use the *checking method*
- use the *camping out method*

The *checking method* involves going in to your child at regular time intervals to check on them. The purpose of returning to their room is to reassure your child that you are still there and to reassure yourself that your child is ok.

- for some children, frequent checking is good – say every 2 minutes
- for others, less checking works best – say every 5 or 10 or 15 minutes
- continue to check on your child as long as they are upset
- the checks should be *brief* (1 minute) and *boring*. Calmly tell your child it’s time to go to sleep but don’t play any games!



The *camping out method* involves putting a chair next to your child's bed and gradually removing the chair as your child begins to fall asleep alone. On the first night, the parent sits in the chair until the child falls asleep. On the second night, the chair is moved a metre away from the child's bed and the same process is repeated. Continue this until the child is able to fall asleep with the chair and parent outside of the bedroom.

What happens if my child comes out of the room?

If your child comes out of their room you must take them straight back. Ignore any requests for food, drink or talking. Take them back to their room, say "goodnight" and leave. You may have to take your child back many times before they get the message.

Respond to your child during the night.

In the beginning, respond to your child as you normally do throughout the night (e.g. sitting with them). Research shows that most children will naturally begin sleeping through the night within 1–2 weeks of falling asleep quickly and easily at bedtime. If your child continues to wake during the night after two weeks, then use the same checking method described above for the nighttime wakings too. Avoid taking your child out of the room overnight to e.g. watch TV or have a drink, as this will only reinforce bad habits.

Removal of an activity or item

If there is an activity which your child associates with going to bed and this activity also keeps them awake overnight, slowly remove this activity or item from their bedtime routine.

Common things which children use to fall asleep but keep them awake overnight include:

- TVs
- Computer/Playstation games
- Mobile phones

Gradually decrease the amount of time your child spends doing the activity before sleep by shortening the activity by 10 minutes every night. Reward them for spending less time on the activity (eg by a special stamp or sticker in the morning).

If your child normally falls asleep in front of the television, the television should be turned off when the child is drowsy, but not asleep. Better still, remove the TV, mobile phone or computer from the child's room altogether.

