

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Helping Children Find Their Way to Slumberland

“**D**ON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES, don't nod your head,” Mary Poppins sings to her two charges to lull them into falling into Slumberland, even though they're resisting. Most of us need tricks to get children to bed at a reasonable time, especially now with darkness coming earlier.

The amount of sleep children get is actually crucially important. As one mother said recently, “A happy child is a well-rested child.” We've all paid the price for letting children stay up too late—crying, tantrums, frustrations. None of us can have the same self-control and perspective when we're overtired, children least of all.

In preschool we often try to put over 20 children to sleep at the same time. How do we do it? We slow children down and calm them before we have them come very quietly into the nap room. We play soothing music that they associate with falling asleep. We sit by them, rubbing their backs or heads. In cases when a child's talking disrupts others, a teacher takes him outside and quiets him before returning. We also use the rocking chair to rock children to sleep.



Here are some tips for helping children to get the sleep they need:

- Start bedtime at the same time each evening and make it early so they get at least 10 to 12 hours' sleep. Children get reenergized as the evening goes on and it's harder to calm them.
- Avoid excitement before the bedtime routine begins.
- Don't let your children watch television before bedtime.
- Blackout shades help keep out unwanted light.
- Establish bedtime rituals that you carry out each evening.
- When a child says “I can't fall asleep,” don't worry. Even lying in bed looking at shadows on the ceiling counts as rest. Take advantage of their bedtimes to get to sleep yourself.

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