



Creating Restful Nap Times

Sleep is as essential to overall childhood health as a warm and nurturing environment, great learning experiences, food, and hygiene. During sleep, children's brains restore the energy needed for their minds and bodies to operate well during the rest of the day.

The sleep needs of children during the day vary according to

- The amount of sleep the child gets each night
- The age of the child
- The general health of the child
- The amount of physical energy spent during the morning



Some children stop taking an afternoon nap early, between two and four years of age, while others continue to need a nap until Kindergarten begins. According to the National Sleep Foundation, infants typically sleep 9-12 hours during the night and take 30 minute to two-hour naps, one to four times a day – fewer as they reach age one. Toddlers typically need 12-14 hours of sleep each day. By 18 months of age, most all toddlers will have decreased their nap need to once a day lasting between one and three hours. Preschoolers typically sleep 11-13 hours each night and most children do not nap after five years of age.

Young children's sleep occurs in ninety minute cycles. The cycle looks something like this:

Stage 1: Drowsiness; falling asleep

Stage 2: Light sleep

Stage 3: Deep sleep

Stage 4: Dreams, rapid eye movement

Stage 5: Light sleep

When children sleep during nap time, it is best to let them sleep for the full ninety minute sleep cycle. Ideally, they should be left to sleep as long as they want and wake up when their bodies tell them to. Remember, most children will sleep at nap time but as they transition into preschool, some children will not require a nap.



A nap during the day does not lessen night sleep, especially if naps take place right after lunch and do not last longer than one sleep cycle. A common myth is that children will fall asleep earlier at night or will sleep later in the morning if afternoon naps are eliminated. The opposite is more likely to happen, since children who become used to resisting their need to sleep during the day may try to do the same at night.

Not all children need to nap, however studies show that quiet rest periods will rejuvenate and reenergize young bodies and minds.

Preparing for Nap Time

- ❖ During the morning, follow a fixed and consistent routine. Follow a rhythm of high energy and low energy activities throughout the morning.
- ❖ Have a relaxed lunch time with healthy foods
- ❖ Transition to nap time with predictable routines, for example let your child choose 2 favorite books and a stuffed animal to bring to bed with them.
- ❖ Create a quiet, calm environment by lowering lights. Let fresh air into the room, if possible.
- ❖ Once your child is in their bed, read or tell a favorite story using a quiet and calm tone of voice. Reading a story is both calming for children and is also a wonderful way to squeeze in a literacy activity. The lower your voice is, the quieter and calmer your child will become to hear the story.
- ❖ Model calmness and peacefulness yourself, this is especially important if nap time has been a power struggle in the past. The more calm you are, the more calm your child will be.

If your child has not fallen asleep within 30 minutes, it probably means that your child will not sleep. But that's OK! Remember that all children do not need to sleep but all children can benefit from rest.

Getting up from Nap Time

- ❖ Let your child help get their room back in order, i.e., make up the bed, put away the books, etc.
- ❖ Provide snack and some calm activities as your child wakes up. Calm activities include reading, writing, puzzles, drawing, or playdough.