

Preschooler sleep: in a nutshell

By Raising Children Network

A preschooler's rapidly expanding imagination can sometimes get in the way of a good night's sleep. By listening to her fears and helping her overcome them, you can keep the bedtime monsters away.

Children aged from three to five need around 11-13 hours of sleep a night. Some may also have a day nap of about an hour. [Sleep is important](#) for their health, growth and development. If your child sleeps well, she will be more settled and happy during the day. Getting the right amount of sleep also strengthens her immune system and reduces the risk of infection and illness.

Night terrors and nightmares

As your preschooler's imagination takes flight, she may start having [nightmares](#) or [night terrors](#). Night terrors tend to happen in the first few hours of sleep when your child is sleeping deeply; nightmares usually happen between midnight and 4 am.

Here are some tips for dealing with nightmares:

- Explain that she had a bad dream and reassure her. A kiss and a cuddle might help her settle again. If she wants to come into your bed, that's fine. Once she is comforted, you may want to return her to her own bed so that she does not get into the habit of sleeping with you.
- If she has dreamed about monsters, you could try explaining that monsters are only make-believe and can't really hurt her.
- If you notice a recurrent nightmare, explore what may be causing it. Gently ask her about encounters with other children, television shows or other daytime experiences. If you find the culprit, you can reduce her exposure to it.

Bedtime routine

Some children fall deeply asleep very quickly. Others sleep lightly, fidgeting and muttering for up to 20 minutes, before getting into deep sleep. As your preschooler becomes more aware of the world, she may find it harder to settle to sleep. A bedtime routine can help. Most preschoolers are ready for bed around 7 pm, especially if they've had a big day at preschool.

A bedtime routine might look something like this:



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Time	Activity
6.30 pm	Brush teeth, go to toilet, night nappy if needed
6.45 pm	Quiet time (read a book or tell a story)
7 pm	Into bed and kiss goodnight

Some preschoolers can demand more and more bedtime stories as a delaying tactic. You may want to establish a three-book rule for bedtime, with the promise to read more during the day.

If your child takes a [dummy](#) to bed, you may consider losing it (literally) when she is about three, if you think she is ready. Read about how you can help her [let go of the dummy](#).

Night-time pull-ups

Even if your child uses the toilet or potty during the day, it's not time to throw away the nappies just yet. Often, children are between three and four years of age before they are dry at night. Some children don't have dry nights until six or seven.

Putting a night-light on and a potty in her room may prompt her to wee there during the night. Let her know that you will help her if she needs it. If not, there's no worry. Most children grow out of night wetting all by themselves.

Getting up after bedtime

Your preschooler may go through a stage of calling out from her bed or getting up after you have said goodnight. Try these tips:

- Avoid boisterous play before bedtime, as it may make it harder for her to settle.
- Establish a consistent, calming [bedtime routine](#).
- Make sure her room is cool, quiet and dark.
- Before leaving the room, check your child has everything she needs and remind her to stay quietly in bed.
- Try not to respond to her calls after you have turned the light out. If you respond, she may try the same thing again next bedtime.
- If she gets out of bed, calmly ask her to go back to bed and remind her that you are just in the other room. Repeat this firmly and quietly over and over until she doesn't get up again.

Your child may actually need something if she is calling out. If she is scared of a monster under her bed, a quick check by you (with the light off) can confirm the room is monster-free and your preschooler may then settle. If she is scared of the dark, think about using a night-light.

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GLOSSARY

dummy

A rubber or silicone teat designed for a baby to suck on; also known as a pacifier.

Positive bedtime routine

A routine based on a series of pleasurable activities (such as having a bath, brushing teeth and reading a story) before bedtime, with the aim of soothing and calming the child before sleep.

More to explore

- ▶ [Positive bedtime routines](#)

Last reviewed
17-05-2006