

Eyes on



# Sleeping behaviour

Good sleep, for good growth



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY

*child development*



***“The difference between a good sleeper and a poor sleeper depends on how easily they can fall back asleep.”***

## What do we know?

- Babies’ sleep alternates between periods of agitation (rapid and irregular breathing, agitation, short cries, eye movements) and calm (slow and regular breathing, few eye movements).
- It is normal for children to wake up during the night. The difference between a good sleeper and a poor sleeper depends on how easily they can fall back asleep.
- Premature babies are not more likely to have sleep problems than full-term babies.
- Sleep problems are extremely common in early childhood. Between 20-30% of young children are considered to be poor sleepers. This means they wake up often, cry, have trouble getting back to sleep, make repeated demands at bedtime, etc. Some of these behaviours are temporary and resolve with time and good sleeping habits.
- If sleep problems are not taken care of during early childhood (1 to 5 years), they are likely to persist for a long time.
- Poor sleep in early childhood has a negative effect on brain development, physical growth, behaviour, moods, emotions, memory, success at school, and the well-being of the parents and family.
- Children need different amounts of sleep depending on their age.
  - Newborns: Sleep about 16-18 hours out of 24.
  - 3-4 months old: Sleep more at night and stay awake longer during the day.
  - 1 year old: Sleep about 10-12 hours each night. They tend to take 2 long naps during the day.
  - 3-10 years old: Should sleep a minimum of 10-11 hours a night.
- The quality of the child’s sleep is influenced by many different factors, including genetics (neurological problems, child temperament) and environment (parent-child interactions especially just before bedtime, parenting practices, and the sleep environment, i.e. noise level, temperature, darkness, etc.).

## Paying attention to...

## What can be done?

... establishing a consistent and predictable bedtime routine to help your child relax and get ready to sleep.

- Before bedtime, do calm and pleasant activities in your child's bedroom (e.g., read together, listen to soothing music). Stop all stimulating activities 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Keep to a regular schedule for mealtime, play, bedtime and wake-up time.

... using strategies to reduce sleep-problem behaviours and to reinforce appropriate ones.

- Put your child to bed while he's awake so he learns to fall asleep on his own.
- Gradually take longer and longer to respond when he cries or asks for things at bedtime or when he wakes in the night.
- Praise your child when he goes to bed well.

... addressing your child's fears and anxieties about bedtime, night-time and sleep.

- At bedtime, give your child an object (blanket, stuffed animal or pacifier) to help him comfort himself.
- Model positive thoughts or imagery before bedtime.
- Encourage your child to replay his nightmare in his imagination or on paper to invent a different ending.

... investigating your child's physical condition (colic, epileptic seizures, temporary pauses in breathing during sleep) to make sure there's no medical reason for his sleep problems.

- See a doctor.
- If there is a medical issue, intervene as quickly as possible before sleep problems become entrenched and affect your child's development.



# Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of sleeping behaviour, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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