A positive bedtime routine can calm and soothe your child in the 20 minutes or so before bed. A bedtime routine involves doing similar activities in the same way each night. These activities can include having a bath, brushing teeth and reading.

If your child is settling to sleep later than you’d like, start the routine a bit earlier every few days, gradually moving towards your preferred time.

At the end of the 20-minute ‘positive period’, say good night to your child and let them know it is time to rest. You might choose to stay with your child or leave the room. Either way, respond to your child in a calm and quiet way (“I’m still here, but it’s not time to play. It’s time for sleep.”).

Choosing a Bedtime

You might have an ideal bedtime in mind, but when you’re just getting started, it is best to begin with the bedtime that is closest to when your child naturally falls asleep. This increases the chance that the bedtime routine will become strongly linked to sleep time for your child. For example, if you find that your child typically falls asleep around 9 pm, start with this as a temporary bedtime and work towards your ideal time.
Shifting Towards a Consistent Bedtime

About a week after you introduce any changes to your bedtime routine, you can start gradually making your child’s bedtime earlier (if you would like). The process involves making bedtime about 15 minutes earlier every couple of days. You do this until you reach the ideal bedtime for your child.

For example, your child has been falling asleep at 9 pm, but you want an 8 pm bedtime. Here’s what to do:

1. Start by putting your child to bed at 8:45pm
2. Do this for two nights
3. Move bedtime back to 8:30 pm for the next two nights
4. Continue this gradual process until your child is going to bed at the time you want

Shifting bedtime can take time, but a consistent bedtime routine will improve your child’s ability to fall asleep, decrease sleep disruptions, and lead to more positive parenting moments.

A Note on Naps

Most children, even up into preschool and kindergarten age, still need naps during the day. Many children tend to be very active — running around, playing, going to daycare or school, and exploring their surroundings — so it is a good idea to give them an opportunity to slow down. Even if your child doesn’t fall asleep, try to set aside some quiet time during the day for relaxing. The best way to encourage napping is to set up a routine for your child, just as you do for bedtime. Your child, not wanting to miss out on any of the action, may resist the nap, but it is important to keep the routine firm and consistent. Explain that this is quiet time and that you want your child to start out in bed, but that it’s OK to play in the bedroom quietly if he or she can’t sleep.


The Book Nook

- **The Napping House**
  - By Don and Audrey Wood
- **Good Night Moon**
  - By Margaret Wise Brown
- **Good Night, Mr. Panda / Buenas noches, Sr. Panda**
  - By Steve Anthony

References

- Why A Regular Bedtime Is Important For Children
  - https://www.npr.org/2013/12/16/251462015/why-a-regular-bedtime-is-important-for-children
- Sleep and Your Preschooler
- Positive Bedtime Routines
  - https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/sleep/settling-routines/bedtime-routines

For your local parenting resources visit us at: orparenting.org