

Beat the bedtime BLUES



Feeling shattered because your tot's not sleeping? Sleep experts solve your most common toddler snooze issues

Sleeping through

Q What's the best way to get my 2 year old to sleep through the night without using the controlled crying method?

Katie Edwards, via Facebook

A Sarah Ockwell-Smith, founder of ToddlerCalm (toddlercalm.co.uk) says: "Research shows that around a third of all 2 year olds still wake regularly at night. We all have several sleep cycles each night and, for a 2 year old, this can mean waking around ten times. Some toddlers move to a new sleep cycle easily, without help, while others are more needy. Establish a good bedtime routine with an hour of wind-down time, no TV, a warm bath, a small snack (in case your tot's waking because she's hungry), a story, a cuddle and perhaps a massage. Follow this with sensory cues such as relaxing music in her bedroom and give her a comforter that reminds her of you (try an old T-shirt) to snuggle. When your toddler wakes and cries for you, go into her room and cuddle her but keep talk to a minimum and don't take her out of bed. Instead, if possible, pretend you're going to sleep too. She'll probably still cry but will know you're there for her. This will take longer than controlled crying but it is much gentler on both you and your toddler."

Night walker

Q My 2 year old won't stay in bed at night. How can I make her stay put?

Orla Roche, via Facebook

A Joanne Mallon, author of *Toddlers: An Instruction Manual* (£7.99, Nell James Publishers), says: "Congratulations, you've got a normal toddler! This is a very common phase for the under-5s but they do grow out of it. My daughter used to get up and sleep on the floor, but we just ignored this behaviour and eventually it stopped."

The best approach is to keep returning her to bed, but do it in a very low-key, almost boring way – no eye contact, no discussion, no engaging with her behaviour at all. Perhaps use a sticker system to reward her when she does stay in her bed all night. Also up her levels of activity during the day so she really is ready to sleep at bedtime." →

Milking it

Q My toddler has recently started waking between 3 and 5.30am, wanting a bottle of milk, even though she stopped having milk during the night six months ago. What should I do?

Allexis Trost, 30, from London, mum to Chloe, 2, and 36 weeks pregnant

A Hannah Love, child sleep expert and founder of Yummy Baby Group, (yummybabygroup.co.uk), says: "I often find that children who need milk to go back to sleep during the night are relying on the comfort of milk and bottle-sucking to go to sleep at bedtime. A good first step would be to remove your daughter's bottle completely and switch to a beaker to prevent her becoming over-reliant on sucking a bottle to go to sleep. Then, rearrange her bedtime routine slightly so that she cleans her teeth after her beaker of milk. This might take a few days for her to get used to, but it should really help her learn to get to sleep on her own – as well as being better for her teeth, which can be damaged by the sugars in the milk."

COMPILED BY LARA BRUNT



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“My daughter used to get up and sleep on the floor”





PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Early bird

Q How can I get my 4 year old to stay asleep later than 4.30am? Later bedtime doesn't work as he just gets more tired, and a night/day clock didn't help either.

Julie Cook, 45, from Lichfield, mum to Charlie, 4, and Amy, 23 months

A Hannah Love says: "Older children waking too early need to master two things: one being self-soothing, ie. getting back to sleep alone. So make sure your son isn't over-reliant on you or his milk at bedtime. Secondly, you must be in control of his behaviour at other times so he'll listen when you ask him to go back to sleep. If both of these things are in place, and he is happy on the amount of sleep he is getting at the moment, then look at his routine. Try again with a later bedtime. The key is to do this gradually over a period of 7-10 days to allow him time to adapt without being tired in the day."

"Don't allow yourself to get wound up or angry"



Single-mum strategy

Q My tot wakes up crying around 2am and will only sleep if she comes into my bed. I'm a single mum and would love her to sleep through in her own room.

Rochelle Wade, 21, from Stilton, mum to Nevaeh, 23 months

A Vicki Dawson, sleep practitioner and founder of The Children's Sleep Charity (thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk), says: "Does your daughter go to sleep by herself at the beginning of the night or do you need to stay to settle her? If you stay with her until she's gone to sleep then she hasn't learned to settle herself to sleep, so when she does wake during the night she needs you to help her drift off again. The key here is to teach her to settle herself at the beginning of the night. You can do this by gradually moving a little bit away from her each night and allowing her to fall asleep by herself. If she can do this when she first goes to sleep, then she should be able to do it during the night. You need to consistently take her back to bed and tell her 'it's night time, go to sleep'. Don't engage in conversation, as this can be a reward for her. Be aware that she may get up more initially, so you need to be firm and keep returning her to her own room. Resettle her but don't reward her behaviour with kisses and cuddles."

A **Stubborn tot**
My 3 year old just won't go to sleep. She cries for kisses and cuddles, but then gets out of bed within minutes if we give them to her. Any ideas?

Lisa Brown, via Facebook

Q Joanne Mallon says: "What's happening in the period just before you put her to bed? Look at your bedtime routine and make it as calm as possible – no boisterous play or stimulating TV. It sounds very much like she's looking for your one-to-one attention at bedtime, so think about how you can give her more of this at other times, or in the lead-up to bedtime. Don't allow yourself to get wound up or angry, because in your child's eyes that means she's won, as you'll be rewarding her behaviour with more of your attention."