

TIP SHEET

Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler By Ann Douglas

The Top 12 Sleep Strategies for Parents of Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

1. Make sure that your child is getting adequate sleep.
2. Begin your child's bedtime routine when your child is sleepy but not overtired.
3. Use the power of daylight to reset your child's sleep-wake clock.
4. Provide your child with a sleep environment that is sleep enhancing.
5. Make sure your child's sleep environment is safe, too.
6. Teach your child how to soothe himself back to sleep, and be aware how sleep associations affect your child's sleep habits.
7. Ease your child into a regular sleep and nap schedule.
8. Don't be in any rush to eliminate naps.
9. Serve your child foods that are sleep enhancing, not sleep inhibiting.
10. Use physical activity to promote sleep.
11. Avoid highly stimulating forms of play right before bedtime.
12. Don't forget to practice good sleep habits yourself.

Finding the Sleep Solution That's Right for You

1. There's no one-size-fits-all sleep solution.
2. When choosing between your various sleep training options, it's important to factor in
 - Your child's age and stage
 - Your child's temperament
 - Your parenting philosophies/style/beliefs
 - The day-to-day realities of your family's situation
 - Whether you're dealing with
 - *a sleep issue* (you're basically coping okay and/or what you've learned about sleep and infant development tells you that your child's sleep patterns are developmentally on-track—or not that far off track),
 - *a sleep problem* (you feel some sense of urgency in solving your child's problems, either out of concern for your child's well-being or your well-being), or
 - *a sleep emergency* (the situation has reached the crisis point: you can no longer cope with the status quo).

Remember:

- Your parent intuition will help you to come up with a customized sleep solution—perhaps the best elements of some “off the shelf” sleep solutions or something uniquely designed by you to meet your child/family's needs.
- Don't think of any sleep program as a sleep blueprint. Only use the parts that make sense for you and your child. You know your child, yourself, and your family's situation best, so you are in the best position to judge which sleep solution is the best option for your family.

Common Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler Sleep Problems	
Problem	Solutions
1. "Our baby is waking to breastfeed every couple of hours. We're hardly getting any sleep."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sleep when the baby sleeps (or make daytime sleep a priority as much as you reasonably can). ○ Simplify nighttime parenting. ○ Choose sleeping arrangements that work for everyone. ○ Call for backup (e.g., your partner, family, friends, postpartum doula, others). ○ Boost your energy through exercise and nutrition. ○ Manage the stress that goes along with being chronically sleep deprived.
2. "Our "high needs" four-month-old wants to be held for long periods of time. She spends a lot of time nursing for comfort, and she can't seem to sleep unless she's in physical contact with another human being."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "High needs babies are high needs 24 hours a day." – Marie, 35, mother of one ○ University of Reading, UK study found that children with more challenging temperaments take longer to master basic sleep skills and need more help from their parents to master these skills. At the same time, parents need to be more persistent in encouraging consistent bedtime rituals, consistent bedtimes, consistent wake times, and teaching self-soothing behaviors. ○ "Fit" of temperament is also important: how well your temperament fits with your child's and whether you trust your intuition in deciding what will work best for your child, given what you know about your child's temperament. Don't just opt for the one-size-fits-all sleep solution that's the current "sleep flavor of the month."
3. "I can't decide whether my six-month-old has a sleep problem or not. Is there a right time to start sleep training?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are your baby's sleep patterns a problem to you? ○ Are they affecting your ability to function during the day? ○ If there's a problem, are you and your partner on the same wavelength when it comes to dealing with your baby's sleep problem?
4. "My baby hates sleeping on her back, but I know this is the sleep position that leading health authorities recommend."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider swaddling your baby (but remember that there are important safety points to bear in mind with swaddling). ○ Ask yourself if it's the sleep position or the environment that's bothering your baby. ○ Could another factor (e.g., GERD) be to blame?
5. "My colicky baby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Colic is crying that lasts for more than three hours per

<p>often startles into wakefulness the moment I get him to sleep. Then the crying starts all over again.”</p>	<p>day, that occurs more than three days per week, and that lasts for longer than three weeks in an infant that’s otherwise healthy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incidence: 5-25% of babies. ○ Peak of colic: age 6 weeks. Most babies will outgrow it by age 4 months, but continues in some babies until age 6 months and sometimes beyond that point. ○ Minimize likelihood of startling once baby is in bed by minimizing transition to sleep environment: smell, temperature, noise, motion/vibration. As baby gets a little older, you’ll want to start thinking about encouraging a self-soothing routine, but while the colic is the primary concern, make soothing your baby the priority.
<p>6. “My eight month old wakes up every hour on the hour all night long. I’m not getting any sleep at all.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you’re feeding your baby each time she wakes in the night, try offering something other than food when your eight-month-old first wakes up. ○ You may find it works well to ask your partner to check on your baby. (Remember, mom = food.) ○ Make sure baby’s actually waking up—not just making noises in her sleep. ○ Give your baby a chance to get herself back to sleep if she’s making “talking” or “mild complaining” sounds that sound more like someone who’s half-awake and mildly disgruntled than someone who is in distress. There’s a fine line to be walked between being responsive and being so vigilant that we don’t allow our babies to learn to settle themselves in the night. ○ Learning to distinguish between your baby’s various cries and trusting your parenting intuition can eliminate a lot of the stress of nighttime parenting—as can letting go of the guilt that accompanies that “rule” that says that any crying or fussing is harmful to your baby. We don’t want to try so hard to prevent our babies from experiencing any sort of frustration, however brief or mild, that we deprive our children of the opportunity to develop valuable self-soothing skills (the foundation on which “sleeping through the night” rests).
<p>7. “My nine-month-old was sleeping through the night, but now he’s started waking up again.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Your baby may be experiencing a developmental breakthrough that’s interfering with sleep. ○ Your baby may be struggling with separation anxiety. Keep your baby close to you during his waking hours. Remember separation anxiety is the ultimate compliment to you: you’re special! ○ You’re not going back to square one when it comes to sleep, even if it feels that way. This is just a temporary

	blip on the road to sleep nirvana.
8. "When I ask my toddler if she's ready for bed, he always says, 'No.'"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't phrase your statement as a question: Say, "It's bedtime." (Otherwise, you needlessly leave yourself open to a "No!") ○ Give your toddler advance warning that bedtime is coming. ○ Ask yourself if your toddler's bedtime routine is still working as well as it once did. ○ Is bedtime too early or too late? Has your toddler moved from tired to overtired? Is his nap schedule interfering with his bedtime schedule? (Look for signs of tiredness vs. overtiredness and consider how well your toddler is coming throughout the day.) ○ Can you think of any possible reasons for your toddler's bedtime resistance? ○ Realize that learning to go to bed and stay in bed is a skill—and learning a new skill can be frustrating for some kids. Not every toddler is a big fan of bedtime. Some are so eager to drink in all the adventures in every moment of wakefulness that they hate to succumb to sleep.
9. "My toddler gets up at the crack of dawn—5:30 am!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Getting up too early can be a sign of overtiredness. ○ Don't follow other people's advice to keep your child up later. That will only make the problem worse. ○ Watch for this clue: Does your child want to go back to bed within two hours of getting up in the morning? ○ Other possibilities: your toddler's sleep-wake cycle could be slightly out of whack or something else could be waking her up.
10. "My 16 month old hates taking naps. Some days he's wide awake all day."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Decide if your toddler still needs a nap. (Most 16 month olds do.) Weigh the following factors when you're deciding whether he still needs that nap or not: mood; energy level; coordination; ability to complete tasks; overall sleep patterns. ○ Encourage quiet time at the time when you'd like him to take naps. ○ Look at your toddler's overall sleep patterns. An overtired child may not nap.
11. "My toddler keeps losing his pacifier in the middle of the night—and crying for me to help her come and find it."	<p>A sleep association has been formed involving the pacifier.</p> <p>You've got two basic choices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make it easier for your child to find his pacifier in the night; 2. Wean your child off his pacifier—ideally sooner rather than later.

<p>12. "I think it's time to move my toddler from a crib to a bed (or to go from co-sleeping to solo sleeping)."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Move your toddler before he takes a tumble out on his own. Keep tabs on your child's height and climbing abilities. Other issues: toilet training, wants his own big bed. Don't make the move because you need the crib for a new baby. ○ Set up the big bed alongside the crib. Your child may want to try napping in it first. Don't be in any rush to take it down. ○ Consider nighttime safety issues and bed safety issues. ○ If you've been co-sleeping, make the transition in stages: (e.g., family bed in parents' room, one parent temporarily "bunking in" in toddler's room).
<p>13. "My preschooler has a really difficult time winding down at bedtime."</p>	<p>In addition to ensuring that your preschooler's bedtime routine is still effective and keeping the after-dinner atmosphere calm rather than crazy, try some of the following preschooler-friendly relaxation techniques: storytelling, emptying my brain, pictures in my head, music, progressive muscle relaxation, a warm bath.</p>
<p>14. "I can't figure out why my toddler kicks up such a fuss when it's time to go to bed."</p>	<p>Try running through this checklist to see if any of these fit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Your toddler isn't tired and/or hasn't had enough physical activity ○ Your toddler is being a toddler (e.g., asserting his/her independence) ○ Your toddler doesn't want to miss out on anything fun or exciting ○ Your toddler is too wound up or something else (a too-full tummy?) is interfering with your toddler's ability to get to sleep
<p>15. "Sometimes I can't figure out why my child has woken up in the night."</p>	<p>Some possible explanations: He's hungry, overtired, overstimulated, wet/dirty diaper or needs to go to the bathroom, ill or in pain, hasn't learned to soothe herself to sleep, sleep environment is interfering with sleep, wants extra comfort, experiencing developmental breakthrough, in the habit of waking in the night</p>

Ann Douglas is the author of *Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler* and *Mealtime Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler* as well as the bestselling titles in The Mother of All® books series. Visit Ann online at www.motherofallblogs.com and www.sleepsolutionsbook.com. © Ann Douglas 2006. For reprint permission, please email ann@having-a-baby.com.