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## Beat the Bedtime Blues with a Sure-Fire Sleep Solution for Your Preschooler

By Kristi Gaylord



Bedtime is often the most challenging part of the day for parents of preschoolers. While you're desperate to hit the couch and relax, your child is just as desperate to avoid letting the day come to an end. Pediatricians recommend preschoolers sleep ten to twelve hours each day since their brains and bodies are growing at a rapid rate, so sleep is essential to your child's growth and development. Before you arm yourself for a battle of wills with your little one tonight, follow these tips to create a consistent and calming bedtime ritual that will have you both unwinding in peace and quiet in no time.

### Create a Routine

Designing a bedtime routine for your preschooler's unique needs is the most important step to a peaceful and slumber-filled evening. Three-to-five-year-olds thrive on predictability and order, and knowing what to expect each evening can help them make a smooth transition from active daytime behavior to calm evening activities. "Bedtime rituals for children are important because they help prompt a child into "sleep mode", an emotional and physical state that prepares their little bodies for sleep," says Elizabeth Donovan, child development expert and founder of [Parentingpink.com](http://parentingpink.com/) [http://parentingpink.com/]. "Both "prediction" and "routine" are developmentally important to children because they can use both of these tools to successfully put themselves to bed as they grow."

What should the routine include? The answer depends on your child. Begin by making a list of everything that needs to occur before your preschooler is tucked in for the night. Include such universal tasks as putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, and reading a story, and then customize the list to add the small details unique to your child, such as switching on the white noise machine, hugging her favorite stuffed animals, or picking out her clothes for the following day. Then, go over the list with your preschooler, and consider creating a visual representation of the tasks to post in her room. Hippo's Bedtime Routine chart from [Excited2Learn.com](http://www.excited2learn.com/shop/) [http://www.excited2learn.com/shop/] includes a bedtime board and 20 cards illustrating various nighttime activities that you can use to customize a routine for your child's individual needs.

Keep in mind that regardless of the components, the routine should last no longer than 30 minutes from beginning to end.

### Turn Off the TV

While many parents allow their preschoolers to watch television after dinner, child development experts advise against it. Rather than helping the child to wind down at the end of the day, television can often have the opposite effect and act as a stimulant. The last thing you want your preschooler to do right before bedtime is to tear your house apart looking for Blue's Clues.

Instead, engage in quiet and distraction-free activities. Read a pre-selected number of books with your preschooler (books about going to bed, such as Sandra Boynton's *The Going to Bed Book*, are best) put on some soothing music, or cuddle with your child and talk about the day's events.

### **Fight the Fears**

If there's anything that can thwart parents' efforts to get their child in bed for the night, it's fears. "Preschoolers have fears that are very real to them even when they appear foolish to adults," says Aviva Pfllock, parent educator and co-founder of [Parentopia.com](http://www.parentopia.net/) [http://www.parentopia.net/]. "If your child has issues with light, dark, shadows, doors, certain toys, or furniture, address them as real concerns and work with your child to handle it."

Talk to your child prior to bedtime (morning or afternoon is best) about the fears so that her concerns don't become a reason to stay awake, and then remove any offending object from your child's room, stash away toys that can cast shadows on the wall, or add a nightlight to the room if your child is afraid of the dark.

### **Give Choices to Avoid Rebellion**

If your child resists going to bed, and draws out the process with repeated requests for an additional story, a drink of water, a snack, or a fourteenth kiss, she may feel powerless over the bedtime ritual. Try empowering your preschooler by giving her choices. Allow her to select which books she would like you to read to her, whether she wants to wear her purple or her blue pajamas, or consider her input in the order of the tasks of her bedtime routine. By providing your child with choices, you relinquish a bit of control, but the tradeoff can yield positive results from your little bedtime-fighting rebel.

### **Use Yoga**

If your preschooler has a hard time winding down at the end of the day, she might respond well to yoga, which helps children relax and provides a smooth transition from daytime to evening. "Yoga's physical movement and focus on breath work helps to calm a child's mind and body simultaneously, creating a stronger overall mind/body connection," says Abbie Davies, owner and founder of [My First Yoga](http://myfirstyoga.com/) [http://myfirstyoga.com/]. Not only does bedtime yoga provide children the tools needed to control the relaxed state of their minds and bodies before sleep, but the tools can also help them with stress management in other parts of their lives.

Abbie Davies recommends the following yoga poses to help preschoolers ready themselves for bed:

**Rock the Baby:** Show your child how to cradle her leg with her knee close to her inner elbow and her foot close to her opposite inner elbow as if the leg was a baby. Have her sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" as she slowly rocks the baby side to side. Then, have her switch legs and repeat the pose.

**Big Hug:** Have your preschooler lie down on her back and hug her knees to her belly. Then, instruct her to sway her body side-to-side, as the two of you take five slow, deep breaths to calm both your minds and bodies.

### **Return the Roamer**

Even after putting forth your best effort at creating a soothing nighttime ritual for your preschooler, she can still emerge from her bedroom, refusing to go to sleep. Rather than allowing her 10 more minutes of playtime or another story, return her promptly to her bed and tell her it's time for her to sleep so she'll have energy to play tomorrow. If she gets up again, keep your tone and your message

consistent, and walk her back to her bedroom. Once your child figures out she can't stall her bedtime, she'll eventually settle down to sleep.

Bedtime doesn't have to be a battle. By tailoring a routine to your preschooler's individual's needs and temperament, creating a calming atmosphere beginning an hour before bedtime, and delivering a firm and consistent message to encourage your child to stay in bed, both you and your preschooler can get the rest you need to wake up refreshed in the morning.

*Kristi Gaylord is a freelance writer and a member of the Root & Sprout team. She's also a mother to a two-year-old daughter and seven-month-old twins.*

*Image courtesy Carla Peroni*

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### 3 Responses to "Beat the Bedtime Blues with a Sure-Fire Sleep Solution for Your Preschooler"



**Damselfly** [<http://growingalife.blogspot.com/>]:

May 22nd, 2009 at 12:52 am

We have big bedtime resistance. Even when you know he's really tired, he just draws it out like crazy. I don't know if he would go for yoga, but we could try that or giving him choices — the only things we haven't tried!

**1**



**kristi** [<http://interruptedwanderlust.blogspot.com/>]:

May 22nd, 2009 at 8:10 pm

Isabella is heavy into bedtime procrastination too these days. It's "I need another cup of water/story/tissue/etc." Try the yoga and let me know if it works!

**2**



**Kathleen W.** [<http://katydidandkid.blogspot.com/>]:

May 24th, 2009 at 8:40 am

These are great tips, and I'll keep many of them in mind for when my son gets older. Right now, at age 1, he's a pretty good sleeper but like many parents know, predictable behavior and kids often don't mix. I like the idea of yoga too, like the other commenters.

**3**