

Parenting Revolution

Toddler Edition

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ACTIVITY SHEET



By the toddler years, most children are already sleeping through the night in their own cot/crib or bed, and most often in their own room. However, getting your toddler into bed and keeping them in bed is not always a case of 'sweet dreams'. Many toddlers still struggle with sleep (and bedtime) for a variety of reasons, causing untold levels of stress and frustration for parents. Getting a good night's sleep is vital for both toddlers and their parents. Quality sleep is just as (if not more) important to health as nutrition and exercise. In fact, contemporary research now suggests sleep is the foundation upon which the benefits of nutrition and exercise depend. Therefore, this session aims to help you create a healthy sleep-wake schedule that will benefit the whole family.



PROGRAM DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES SUMMARY

This session is designed to help you:

- (a)** understand the importance of sleep hygiene for developing bodies/brains
- (b)** develop a functional bedtime routine and healthy sleeping patterns
- (c)** address the common fear of sleeping in the dark

Slumberland Assessment

Not only is quality sleep essential for your toddler's cognitive development, but it also lowers the risk of childhood obesity, learning problems and attention issues. If your child's sleeping patterns are chaotic or regularly disrupted, then your sleep quality will also likely be impacted. Among adults, poor quality sleep adversely affects stress levels, memory function, health and wellbeing, as well as relationship dynamics. It's time to take sleep seriously.



Does YOUR TODDLER have any of the following bedtime/sleep issues? ✓

Fear of the dark		Not staying in bed when put down for the night		Crying in the night	
Going to bed late (not getting adequate sleep)		Climbing out of cot/crib or bed before dawn		Waking during the night	
Difficulty going to bed		Waking from a wet or soiled nappy/diaper		Crying when put to bed	
Frequent bad dreams (night terrors)		Visiting or climbing into bed with you at night		Demanding bottles or feeds during the night	

Do YOU have any of the following bedtime/sleep issues? ✓

Restless or broken sleeping patterns		Alcohol consumption within 2 hours of bedtime		Difficulty falling asleep (lying awake)	
Going to bed late (not getting adequate sleep)		Waking unusually early; unable to fall back asleep		Frequent bad dreams (night terrors)	
Avoiding bed or resisting sleep		TV/ipad/smart phone use within 30mins of bedtime		Sleeping next to someone who snores	

It's never too late to develop a healthy bedtime routine and sleeping pattern!

THE GOAL IS FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR CHILD TO SETTLE AND SLEEP PEACEFULLY THROUGH THE NIGHT. PARENTS REQUIRE AN AVERAGE OF 7-9 HOUR'S SLEEP, WHEREAS TODDLERS NEED 10-12 HOURS OF SLEEP AT NIGHT (PLUS AN ADDITIONAL 1-2 HOURS OF SLEEP DURING THE DAY).

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene refers to the healthy habits and positive associations that enhance the quality of your (or your child's) sleep. Sleep hygiene is important for both adults and children. The way you approach your bedtime has the potential to either set you up for a successful night's sleep or perpetuate poor sleep.

Consider the following sleep hygiene hacks to enhance sleep for your toddler:



CONSISTENT BEDTIME

Ensure your child goes to bed at the same time each night. This regulates their sleep cycle and body clock and leads to a better night's sleep. It also gives a sense of predictability which lowers your child's anxiety and reduces the likelihood of overtiredness.



LIMIT DAYTIME NAPS

Daytime naps for toddlers can be a tricky to balance. After the age of 1 year, your child will likely start transitioning from two daytime naps to one (of approximately 2 hours in length). Between 2-3 years, toddlers tend to reduce their nap to 1 hour. At 3-4 years of age, 75% of toddlers drop their daytime nap altogether. Your child will give cues to tell you when they are ready to transition. If your toddler has difficulty falling asleep at night, try reducing the duration of their daytime nap. If your child becomes resistant to daytime naps or won't sleep when put down, engaging non-stimulating play while lying in their cot/crib or bed is the next best thing.



ROUTINE

Toddlers thrive on predictability, stability and routine. A consistent bedtime routine each night helps create positive sleep associations. Your child, for example, will learn that having a bath and getting into their pyjamas, means 'time for bed'. This signals to their brain to prepare for sleep, resulting in increased drowsiness.



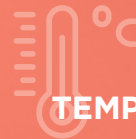
DARK & QUIET ROOM

Keeping the bedroom dark and quite for evening sleeps will assist in keeping your child asleep. Darkness is important for the production of melatonin (which regulates temperature and the sleep-wake cycle). Some toddlers may develop a fear of the dark, so it is ok to introduce a small night-light. Try to use a soft LED light, but keep it as dim as your child can tolerate.



SLEEP CUES

Intentionally introduce positive sleep associations (things your child associates with sleep); this helps your little-one know when it's nearing time for sleep and assists them with self-settling. Ideas include a familiar song, comforter toys, white noise or a sleeping sack/blanket. If your child is only ever exposed to these things when it's time for sleep, the association with bedtime will remain strong.



TEMPERATURE

Being either too hot or too cold is one of the most common reasons toddlers wake during the night. Ensure your toddler's sleep clothes and bed covers are appropriately for the seasonal climate. Optimal sleep takes place when the bedroom remains at a consistent temperature - experts recommend between 20 to 22°C (68 to 72°F).

Q. Which of the above sleep hygiene hacks could you also implement for yourself?

Bedtime Routine

What you include in your bedtime routine is up to you. Some parents opt for dinner, bath, brush teeth, then bed; or your routine may be a little more elaborate, incorporating music, narrated stories, picture books, evening prayers, singing lullabies, having cuddles and saying a parting 'sleep phrase' (e.g. "goodnight, sleep tight") before lights out. Try to incorporate at least 10 minutes of wind-down time in your toddler's bedroom, helping them to feel calm and relaxed prior to you leaving the room.



What familiar wind-down and sleep time preparation activities could you engage?

DAYTIME NAP

01			04
02			05
03			06

NIGHT-TIME SLEEP

01			04
02			05
03			06

Signposts for Sleep

Some parents maintain the philosophy that ‘toddlers will sleep when tired.’ However, if you wait until your toddler is sleepy before putting them to bed, you may miss the exit to slumberland. Toddlers have a reputation of being fun loving one moment and overtired the next. If you miss the early signs of tiredness (predictably displayed in children who have a regular bedtime), overtiredness quickly leads to grumpiness. Grumpy toddlers are not only harder to get into bed, but exhaustion leads to physiological and mental changes (making it more difficult to fall asleep).



What are the early signs your toddler may be getting tired? ✓

Grizzling or crying		Demanding attention		Yawning	
Clinginess		Bored with toys		Resting their head	
Clumsiness		Fussiness with food		Laying on the ground	

Strange as it may sound, over-tired and grumpy toddlers may end up being too tired to sleep.

Sleep Training: YES or NO?

If your child is unable to settle without you rocking, patting or feeding them, it may be time to consider sleep training. Sleep training simply means teaching your toddler to remain in their cot/crib or bed throughout the night, be weaned off overnight milk feeds, and ultimately, fall asleep on their own (without having to rely on you). However, there are different schools of thought on the best way to achieve this. Ultimately, it is up to you to decide which sleep management method will work best for your family.

GRADUATED EXTINCTION METHOD

01 SELF-SOOTHING

In the days or weeks leading up to the implementation of sleep training, teach your child self-soothing skills (for example, cuddling their teddy, humming a song, patting their favourite blanket). Encourage them to use these skills when they feel anxious or upset – especially when mummy/daddy are not present.

02 BIG BOY/GIRL STATUS

Communicate to your toddler, that because they are now a big boy/girl, you are implementing a new bedtime plan. Explain in advance what's involved (in simple language), so they have a clear expectation of what will happen when it takes place. Make it fun and exciting and highlight possible incentives for effort and rewards for success.

03 DEPLOY AND DEPART

When you put your toddler down to bed, go through your regular bedtime routine. Upon leaving the room, your child may protest (as they've likely become dependent on you to transition them to slumberland). Therefore, keep yourself busy for short while and resist the temptation to give in to their demand for you to return.

04 RE-ENTER

If, after a few minutes, your child continues to cry/protest, re-enter their room to comfort them for 1-2 minutes only. If they're standing when you come back in, gently lay them back down and avoid making eye contact. Re-communicate the new big boy/girl bedtime plan and encourage them to use their self-soothing skills. Once they've calmed down, say your parting sleep phrase and exit the room again.

05 REPEAT

During this second round of being apart from your toddler, try to leave them for a few minutes longer than last time before going back in (up to 5-6 minutes is recommended, but not exceeding 10 minutes). Repeat steps 3 through 5 as many times as it takes until they eventually fall asleep on their own. Repeat the entire process for over the course of a week.


06 CELEBRATE

The following morning, remind and congratulate your toddler on what they achieved (falling asleep on their own). By providing some kind of incentive for effort or reward for success, you will build motivation for the next night and enhance your chances of success.



NOTE:

If your child wakes during the night, simply repeat the process. The first night of training is typically the hardest. So long as you are consistent when implementing your plan (not giving in to demands to pick up, rock, pat or feed the child), each subsequent night typically gets easier and faster. Most children can be trained over the course of a few days (up to one week). Some children take a little longer which can be distressing for parents. If you feel that your toddlers incessant crying/protesting is too hard to handle, ask someone to implement the graduated extinction training on your behalf (ideally, someone with whom your toddler is familiar, e.g., spouse or grandparent) In this instance, while training is ongoing, spend the days with your child and sleep elsewhere at night.

A photograph of a man and a young child lying in bed together. The man is on the left, looking towards the child on the right. The child is wearing a yellow and white striped shirt. The background is a white pillow and blanket.

**In the context of
sleep training,
research indicates
letting your little
one cry for a small
amount of time
does no harm.**

WHEN YOUR CHILD CRIES AFTER YOU'VE LEFT THE ROOM, IT IS MOST LIKELY A 'PROTEST CRY' (THIS IS YOUR CHILD TRYING TO GAIN YOUR ATTENTION AND PROTEST THE FACT THAT YOU'VE LEFT THE ROOM). TODDLERS MAY ALSO CRY AS PART OF THEIR WINDING-DOWN PROCESS.

GREATEST HITS COUNTDOWN

A gentler, albeit often lengthier, approach to sleep training is the “greatest hits” countdown technique. This is particularly useful if your toddler is in the habit of climbing out of their cot/crib or bed when being put down for the night.

01

COMMUNICATE

Explain to your toddler that when it's sleep time, you will be staying with them in their room for them for a few minutes (but in reality, as long as it takes). However, you will have headphones in – highlighting that if they cry, you won't be able to hear them). Their big boy/girl responsibility is simply to stay laying down in their cot/crib or bed and fall asleep.

02

ASSUME THE POSITION

When you put your toddler down to bed, go through your regular bedtime routine. Say your parting sleep phrase, turn the lights off, and take a seat (on the floor or in a chair) not too far away from your toddler (looking slightly away from your toddler). From this point on, make no further eye contact.

03

GAME ON

Put your headphones on (or AirPods in) and play three songs on your greatest-hits playlist. Your mere presence is enough to give your child the security they long for, giving them no reason to cry or protest. However, because its novel having you in the room, it's likely your child will try to gain your attention (e.g. through making noise or calling for you). However, with you being consumed by your favourite songs, you can successfully ignore your toddler's attempts.

04

BE DISCIPLINED

If your toddler stands or attempts to climb out of their cot/crib or bed, return them to a horizontal sleep position. Be disciplined not to talk to them or make eye contact. Should they manage to get your verbal reaction or visual attention, the entire process fails. Therefore, be disciplined and stay the course.

05

STAY THE COURSE

If your toddler is unsuccessful in getting your attention, they lose motivation. As attention seeking behaviour is quenched, it normally doesn't take long for your toddler to drift off to sleep (typically, the same length of time it takes to listen to 3 songs). Some toddlers take more time. Therefore, consider listening to a podcast or seminar that goes for longer (avoid watching on a screen as the bright light will simply attract your toddler's attention).

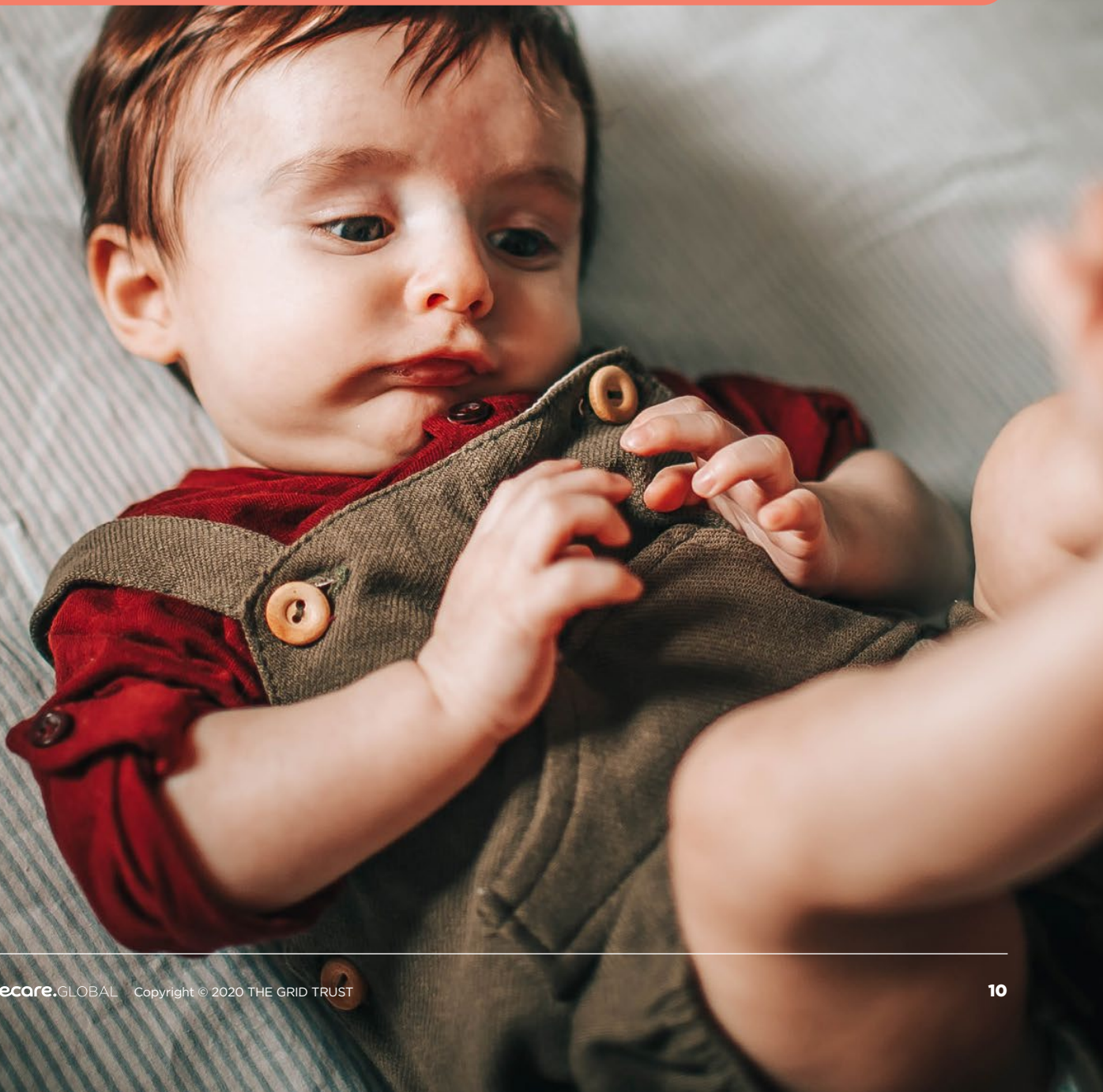
06

GO THE DISTANCE

Over subsequent nights gradually sit further away from your toddler's bed. Slowly but surely, wean your toddler off the need for your presence. After a week or two, you'll be sitting by their door and no longer in their room. However, it's likely your child will still long for your presence. If you depart too quickly, they may revert back to crying and protesting. While this approach to sleep training is gentler, it often takes a longer period of time to lock in behavioural gains.

Sleep Regression

During the first few years of life, your child is likely to go through periods of time where their sleep becomes more disrupted – these are known as sleep regressions. During such a phase, you may find that your toddler wakes more frequently at night or refuses to nap during the day. Sleep regressions are a normal part of your child’s development and may be influenced by a variety of factors – including teething, separation anxiety, and your toddler’s increased sense of independence. Sleep regressions that are common at the 18-month mark can be particularly difficult to handle as your child is learning independence. As such, in addition to disrupted sleep, it’s likely your toddler will also exhibit defiant behaviour and temper tantrums (making it harder to get their sleep back on track). If you’ve found yourself in the midst of a sleep regression, remember ‘this too shall pass’. Although it’s difficult, try to keep everything as normal and as consistent as possible. Continue enforcing limits and boundaries that have already been established and wherever possible, don’t give in to toddler demands (this will only prolong the regression).



Fear of the Dark

Fear of the dark is one of the most common fears experienced by toddlers. The reason darkness is so scary is because when your child is unable to see what's around them their imagination can lead them to think there may be things present that don't actually exist. However, the moment a light is turned on, the truth is revealed. This is why, having a nightlight is a great antidote to a toddler's fear of the dark.

Consider the following tips to combat your toddler's fear of the dark:

01 VALIDATE

Rather than trying to convince your child there's nothing to be afraid of, extend compassion and understanding. Validate their concern by letting them know 'we all get frightened of things from time to time'. The good news is, we don't need to stay frightened.

02 COLLABORATE

Brainstorm potential solutions together with your toddler to combat their fear of the dark. If one of the suggestions offered by your child is 'sleeping with the light on', even though they likely desire for their bedroom light to be left on, redirect their answer. Excitedly say, "what a great idea. Let's get your very own special night light" (creating buy in and excitement).

03 ILLUMINATE

Acquire a nightlight that emits a soft calm light (as opposed to stimulating light). Avoid harsh lamps that cast shadows (which can make toddlers even more afraid). Small electric socket LED lights or portable battery powered LED lamps are the best. Place the light beside or near your toddler's bed.

04 NAVIGATE

Once your toddler is comfortable using a nightlight to manage their fear, you can also help them navigate and overcome their fear altogether (employing the gradual exposure technique learned in Session 2). Using a portable battery powered LED lamp, systematically move the light slightly further away from your child's bed each night, slowly stretching (but not breaching) their comfort zone.

05 GRADUATE

Over the course of a week or two, gradually move the portable LED lamp towards the bedroom door. Once out the door, you can maintain a continued 'hall-light' presence. Alternatively, if through sleeping in increased darkness, you believe they've developed courage and confidence to conquer their fear, help them graduate to "light's out".

General Night-time Anxiety

During the toddler years, in addition to fear of the dark, toddlers may also experience separation anxiety, night terrors or other general worries associated with bed- or night-time. Toddlers may become distressed when being put to bed, try to delay sleep, wake frequently throughout the night or climb into their parent's bed. It's best to address your child's anxiety early to prevent unwanted habits from forming.

Consider the following tips for managing night-time anxiety:

01 TALKING

Calmly talk to your child about what they are feeling. Use feelings faces (from Session 1) to help them to identify their emotion and if they have the verbal skills, have them explain what it is exactly that worry's them. Validate their feelings and reassure them that you're close by.

02 CALMING

Incorporate a simple calming strategy as part of their bedtime routine. This could be slow breathing, evening prayers, listening to calming music, essential oils or cuddling a toy.

03 GUIDING

Whenever your child feels anxious, use guided imagery to help your child to imagine that they are in one of their most favourite places (e.g. ordering ice cream, down at the beach, playing with the dog, sitting on the swing at the park). Encourage your toddler to use their imaginary senses. Ask them questions like "what can you see around you?"; "what can you hear in the background?"; "what can you feel on your skin?").

04 FACING

Discourage avoidance (i.e. delaying bedtime; avoiding sleeping in their own bed) as this serves to reinforce the anxiety. If avoidance has become an issue, gradual exposure, as learned in Session 2, may be a helpful strategy (i.e. setting small steps and gradually working towards facing their fears).

05 PLACING

Create a "worry box". Each time your child feels worried or scared, have them use their imagination to draw what their feeling might look like. Then, scrunch it up the paper and place it in the box. Congratulate them for what they have done – taking the fear that was inside them and packing it away outside of them.

06 REWARDING

Talk to your child about what it means to be brave. Encourage effort and reward courageous behaviour. You may choose to use a reward chart (from Session 2) or simply give praise when they successfully stay in their own bed.