

Peaceful Naptimes

There's nothing worse than a tired, cranky toddler refusing to snooze. Relax! We've got the sleep solutions to send him off to dreamland.

BY CHERYL LOCK

When Rachel Wade's son, Shawn, was a baby, putting him down for a nap wasn't much of a battle: He couldn't wriggle out of her arms yet, and he slept most of the day anyway. But that all changed after he turned 1. "He became more interested in what was happening around him at naptime, and he'd fight me by arching his back as I tried to lay him in the crib," says the Stevensville, Michigan, mother of two.

No matter how mightily kids resist, though, most experts agree that daytime sleep is critical. Children this age are constantly on the move, and naps give them the energy they need to work on building their skills. While you can't explain to a toddler why he needs to sleep, you can keep naptime from turning into a nightmare with these tantrum tamers.

Know His Tired Signs

Ideally, a 1-year-old should have two naps a day: one in the mid-morning and another in the afternoon. But each child is different, and finding the best schedule can be tricky. Many parents fall into the trap of waiting too long to put their toddler into the crib. "By the time some kids yawn or get fussy, they've already become overtired and won't be able to drift off as easily," says Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Nap Solution*. She suggests paying attention to your toddler's tired signs. Watch him closely the hour after he wakes up for a morning or two. Then, compare his well-rested behavior with the way he acts between dinner and bedtime (when he'll be fatigued). If he loses interest in people or toys before bed at night, for example, you can look for these cues during the day to find the best naptime.



Stick to a Routine

Once you have a better idea of when your child's naps should be, you can set a daily schedule for her. Toddlers are creatures of habit and don't deal well with unexpected change. Keeping a predictable nap routine will reassure your little one, and she'll be more likely to cooperate when it comes time to go down. "Incorporate some of the things that work for her at bedtime by creating a mini naptime ritual that is similar," says Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., *Parents* advisor and author of *Sleeping Through the Night*. "If you read or sing to her every night, you should do the same for naps."

Keep It Low-Key

Your afternoons can get packed with cleaning up toys, preparing dinner, and cramming in a million other things. But if you're feeling stressed as you put your child into his crib, he'll pick up on your anxiety and have a harder time dozing off. Take a couple minutes to relax first, and allow your kid to also calm down: Give him a gentle massage or play soothing music on busy days. Close to naptime, avoid things that will get him riled up, like TV or a big meal. If you have to run errands, do it after his morning nap. That way, he'll have time to unwind from all the excitement.

Let Her Self-Soothe

If your kid wakes up during naps, fight the urge to rush in as soon as she cries. Toddlers can fall back to sleep on their own, but they'll only learn how to do this if you don't step in every time, says Judith Owens, M.D., *Parents* advisor and associate professor of pediatrics at Brown University's Alpert Medical School, in Providence. Instead, give her a minute to quiet down by herself. If she doesn't, check in on her but don't pick her up or rock her back to sleep—or she'll expect this every time she wakes up. The next day, wait for several more minutes before going in (and so on for a week). Eventually, she'll get tired of waiting for you and will fall asleep on her own.

Nix a Nap

As your child closes in on 2, you'll most likely discover that one snooze a day is enough. If your kid is resisting a nap because he's active, not cranky, it's probably a good time to rethink his schedule. Consider changing from two shorter naps to a longer midday one. You can make the transition easier by putting him to bed earlier at night. Doing this will help him feel well rested throughout the morning and he won't need to nap until early afternoon. □



I tried putting my 13-month-old to sleep at night without her pacifier, and she had a huge meltdown. When should I begin breaking the habit?

You've got a little wiggle room here, but not much. Medically speaking, children should say bye to Binkies when they're 15 to 18 months old. For one thing, kids who use a pacifier may be at a higher risk for ear infections. "A toddler's power of sucking has gotten strong enough to pull bacteria from her mouth and throat into the middle ear," says Jack Maypole, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine. So, how do you get your child to retire it? Dr. Maypole suggests adding a transitional object to her bedtime routine, such as a blankie or a favorite toy. As she becomes more attached to the new lovey, switch out the pacifier.