

# Sleep

## Toddler and Preschooler Sleep Challenges

Some of the most common sleep challenges for toddlers and their parents are getting in and out of bed, night waking, nightmares and night terrors.

### Getting in and out of bed

*This is a common problem parents encounter, especially when making the transition from the crib to the bed.*

- Calmly return them to their room, provide reassurance that you are still there, you love them, but it is time for sleep.
- Keep your interaction with your child brief (1-2 minutes).
- Ignore the whining or crying, set limits and make them consistent each night with each caregiver.
- Tell your child you will check in on them in 5 minutes and follow through. It will give them a sense of security that you will return and eventually, may keep them from repeatedly calling out to you.

**Some parents have found it helpful to set up a positive reinforcement program, like a sticker, for each night their child stays in bed.**

### Night Waking

*Keeping your actions in the night consistent will help your child realize that when he wakes, he is safe and can go back to sleep in his own bed.*

- As your child moves through the sleep cycles at night there are natural wakeful times in the night.
- It is important to respond to your child in the middle of the night. He may have a soiled diaper, need to use the washroom or be too cold, too hot or be ill.
- Teaching your child to fall asleep on their own is critical to move beyond night waking.
- If your child is accustomed to being nursed, having a bottle, being rocked or held until he is asleep he may demand that in the middle of the night.
- If he can reach for his blanket or teddy bear and know how to settle himself down he will quickly go back to sleep on his own.
- It is important to redirect your child back to bed. Keep your interaction with him brief. Reassure him you are there, he is safe and needs to go back to sleep.



# Nightmares

***Nightmares often peak in children between the ages of four and six. Identifying the source of the nightmares can be helpful in reducing them. If your child is experiencing nightmares, try to determine if he is experiencing stress, such as family discord, changes in routine, illness or trouble and preschool or school.***

- It is important to comfort children who have nightmares. Go to their room to comfort them. Turn on the light and show them they are in familiar surroundings and are safe. Reassure them you are nearby.
- Reassure them many children have nightmares. Don't make light of their scary dreams by telling them they are silly. The dreams are very real to them.
- Let your child tell you about the dream if they want.
- Help your child come up with a new ending to the dream, one that empowers them, gives them courage and sends the bad dreams away.
- Before going to bed, help your child create a happy dream – teach them they can control what they dream about so they are not scared to go to sleep
- Help them to think of something that makes them feel happy, like recalling a pleasant memory.
- Monitor TV shows and video games for content that may make your child scared or fearful.
- Consult your family physician or pediatrician with any concerns you may have.

# Night Terrors

- A night terror does not usually have dream content.
- It most often occurs one to four hours after a child goes to sleep, the soundest part of sleep.
- The night terror is an emotional experience. The child often rouses in a state of panic, is sweaty, has a racing heartbeat, and is very agitated and frightened.
- The child will often thrash about, have wild bulging eyes and be screaming or crying.
- A night terror lasts from 10-30 minutes.
- A child experiencing a night terror may not be awake and often does not recall the experience in the morning.
- You can try to comfort your child in a night terror, although they may push you away.
- Make sure your child is safe, stay with your child and minimize interaction if it seems to be distressing him more.
- Stress in your child's life may increase the frequency of night terrors.
- Consult your family physician or pediatrician with any concerns you may have.

**If you would like more information, contact the Halton Region at 905-825-6000, your local Ontario Early Years Centre or your Family Physician/Pediatrician.**