

Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems Before the New Baby Arrives

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If you are expecting a baby and already have one or more children, it's wise to solve their sleep problems before the new baby arrives. Remember, a newborn typically awakens every three to four hours and adapting to a new baby's schedule is very tiring. If you also have a toddler or a child who is having a difficult time falling asleep, or who regularly gets out of bed during the night, the stress and exhaustion are likely to hinder your ability to enjoy a very special time. By solving your child's sleep problems in the months *before* the new baby arrives, the entire family will be in a better position to enjoy the newest member of the family.

The two most frequent children's sleep problems are not being able to fall asleep and awakening during the night unable to fall back asleep. Brief night waking is normal; however, once kids learn to fall asleep independently at bedtime, they are likely to be able to fall back asleep when they briefly awaken during the night. In contrast, children who have difficulty falling asleep by themselves at bedtime usually have the same problem when they awaken during the night.

If you have been rubbing your child's back or lying down with him until he falls asleep, recognize that he has probably grown accustomed to the attention and will have a difficult time falling asleep without it. If you abruptly withdraw your attention and expect your child to fall asleep on his own, he will be understandably upset—and even more so if it coincides with the arrival of a new sibling. It's true that after weeks of feeling forsaken, if you continually ignore your child's anguished pleas for attention, he will eventually begin to fall asleep on his own. However, it's not necessary for a child to be traumatized in this way. You can teach your child to relax himself to sleep while you gradually and systematically decrease your attention. And best of all, this step toward independence does not have to be a painful process for you or your child.

Getting Ready

Create a consistent bedtime routine—in a predictable calming environment that serves as a bridge between the excitement of daytime and the restful quiet of nighttime. The predictability of the routine and the special time of closeness will bring a wonderful sense of closure to your child's day and help him feel secure in your love. If you have a two parent household, be sure to continue to spend one on one time with your child during the bedtime routine—while the other parent cares for the new baby.

TEACH YOUR CHILD SELF-SOOTHING TECHNIQUES TO FALL ASLEEP:

Step One ~ Progressive Relaxation (Tensing & Relaxing Muscle Groups)

Have your child lie down in his bed. Lift each arm and leg individually, holding each limb tightly before loosely flopping it down on his bed. Then have him tense and relax other muscle groups in his body. For example, have him wrinkle his face and hold his eyes tightly closed, before relaxing his face. (Tense each muscle group for at least 5 seconds before releasing them and relaxing.)

Step Two ~ Focus on the breath

Once a child is thoroughly relaxed he will be ready to focus on the breath. Have him get very quiet and watch his own breath. Children don't need to try to change their breath in any way. This is a time to gather the senses that are usually focused on the outside world and turn them inward. It calms the mind and induces a state of relaxation.

Step Three ~ Creative Visualization

Once a child is relaxed, read (or tell) a story that takes him on a soothing, imaginary journey. Visualization improves with practice and eventually children will be able to use their own imaginations to make up stories as they drift off to sleep.

Gradually, turn the process of falling asleep over to your child.

After the bedtime routine, continue to systematically give your child less and less direction as he uses self-soothing techniques to relax and fall asleep. At first, you may want to sit on the edge of your child's bed while he or she follows the relaxation directions on *The Floppy Sleep Game Book CD*. Or, you can teach your child to relax through a relaxation routine that you create yourself. Over a period of time, as your child becomes more familiar with the relaxation routine, sit further and further away until he or she no longer needs you in the room to relax and fall asleep.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.