



Going to Bed Problems

Getting your preschooler into bed long enough to fall asleep, can pose a challenge for many parents. But while there's no one right way to deal with sleep problems, there are many strategies you can try.

Some of the Reasons Your Child May Not Want to Go to Bed May Be:

- **Having to leave the activity of the house behind.** If they are really involved in a boisterous game just before bedtime, you'll have problems tearing them away. Try to introduce some quieter activities in the run-up to bedtime so that when you move into your night-time routine, they'll be calmer and more ready to relax in bed.
- **Being frightened of being left alone.** If this is the case, no matter what time you put your child to bed, they'll still be unhappy. Try introducing a night light or some gentle music. Often children who are frightened find it reassuring to have the bedroom door wide open so they can hear and see you moving around the house.
- **A very busy or exciting day.** Sometimes it's unavoidable that the excitement of the day runs straight up to bedtime, and on these days you'll just have to have patience if your child struggles to wind down. Try to encourage a bath and a book before bed, or even a quiet game.
- **Lack of a night-time routine.** If your child has no regular night-time routine, then they may not actually be aware that they are going to bed until the very minute they get there. By having a regular routine, they'll learn to follow cues and understand that after teeth-cleaning comes reading then cuddles then bed. And then sleep.
- **Going to bed too early.** Be realistic about what time your child should be going to bed. Sure you'd like them to be asleep by 7pm, but if they are routinely still bouncing around in bed an hour later then chances are they need their bedtime to be moved a little later.

If They Call Out From Their Room:

- Make sure you have a regular, calm bedtime routine in place.
- Before you turn out the light, check that your child has everything they need and remind them that it's time for sleep
- When they call out the first time, go in to them and check that they don't actually need anything (the toilet, a favourite bear) other than your attention. Once you've ascertained that they are OK, quietly and firmly say good night and leave.
- No matter how loud and persistent they get, try to resist responding to their calls. If you do respond by returning to their bedside, they'll endlessly repeat the same behaviour each night to get your attention and delay bedtime.

- If your preschooler shares their bedroom with a sibling, you may want to avoid disruptions and delay your older child's bedtime for a short while - or have them camp out in another bedroom - until your preschooler learns that bed means sleep. And you mean business.

If They Come Out of Their Room:

Some children get into the habit of repeatedly getting out of bed and coming out of their room every night until it seems that your exhausted attempts to convince your overtired child to stay in bed each night is your new bedtime routine.

To put an end to this, you need to send your child a strong, silent message that there's no value in coming out of their room after bedtime because you're not going to give them any attention.

To do this, we suggest:

- immediately pick them up, or take them by the hand, and take them back to bed
- other than firmly reminding them that it's bedtime, don't enter into negotiations or conversation of any kind
- avoid eye contact with them
- be consistent
- always stay calm and goal-focussed. Getting angry or frustrated will only complicate the process.

If you stick to this routine, they'll start staying in their room after you've had a cuddle and turned off the light. Sure, they may not stay in their bed, but as long as they stay in their room, you can count this as a victory!