



Settling and sleep problems in babies and young children

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Settling and sleeping difficulties are common. A sleep problem can be said to exist when your child's sleeping pattern is causing disruption to the family, and you feel that it is a problem. Every family is different, not all parents see their baby's disrupted sleep pattern as a problem and that's OK.

How do you recognise a sleeping problem?

Newborn babies will usually wake to feed frequently overnight. The length of time that your baby sleeps between feeds during the night gradually increases over time. Sometimes babies and young children:

- get confused between day and night
- are difficult to settle to sleep during the day and/or night
- wake up frequently during the night
- only have catnaps during the day (and are often a bit grumpy!)
- will only settle with help: needing to be fed, rocked or cuddled to sleep
- develop challenging feeding and behaviour patterns when they are tired

How to manage settling and sleep difficulties

- It is helpful to understand your child's stage of development so that your expectations are reasonable
- Identify any patterns in sleep behaviour: keep a diary of your child's sleep, eg. she always wakes up a lot after an exciting day
- Avoid over tiredness: watch you baby/child closely for early signs of tiredness and put her to bed before she becomes over stimulated and difficult to settle
- Spend time winding down before you put your child to bed, eg. read a story
- Make sure your child has a clean, dry nappy, is fed, and is not too cold or too hot
- Try to settle your child into the cot/bed when she is awake so that she can learn to fall asleep by herself. If she has never done this before she will need some help to do this initially
- If your baby/child wakes up after only a short time, try to resettle her and extend her sleep
- Look after yourself, sleep when you can, and support each other

When to get help

Sooner rather than later! Sleep deprivation can affect the entire family and result in family stress. You may be able to alter your child's sleep pattern by yourself or you may need some professional help.

Where to get help

- **Books:** There are a number of early parenting books which offer a range of solutions. Tweddle Child and Family Health Service have published a book with Random House: Cummings R, Houghton K, Williams L. *Sleep Right Sleep Tight: A practical proven guide to solving your baby/child's sleep problem.* Available from book shops or Tweddle Child and Family Health Service, 53 Adelaide Street, Footscray, Vic 3011, Phone: (03) 9689 1577. Website: tweddle.org.au
- Your maternal and child health nurse will have resources and practical information such as how to recognise tired signs
- **Early parenting centres:** these can be found in each state and offer residential, day stay, and education programs
- Some private hospitals offer residential and day stay programs
- Explore government child, youth and family websites
- Some states have a maternal and child health after hours telephone service or a parent line
- Talk to other parents: they often have great tricks of the trade!