Settling and sleep problems in babies and young children

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

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!