

Sweet Dreams

How to Make Your Child's Nap Time Successful

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Every parent knows children are always on the go. They're curious. They learn through play and exploration. They have the capacity to rapidly take in new information—and they get tired!

Just because children are tired, doesn't mean they will naturally slow down and

rest. Yet, nap time is a crucial part of a child's day. Sleep is fundamental to learning and recharges children's brains.

According to a recent article published in Harvard Medicine Magazine, "A good deal of a child's brain growth and development occur during sleep. Numerous studies have shown that napping clears the brain...so that it can be filled again with new information." Additionally, "research has found that children who nap soon after learning new words...remember the words 80 percent of the time, as opposed to 30 percent for those who don't nap."

The benefits of napping are well known. Naps can bolster children's attention spans, improve memory and mood, and help with their physical and cognitive development. On the flip side, there are challenges that could arise due to lack of sleep. An overtired child might have a hard time with self-regulation, which can lead to behaviors. Without enough sleep, a child might have difficulty concentrating, listening or following directions.

As an early childhood educator, I've found that what parents want to know is how. How do you get a whole room full of children to fall asleep at school, when I can't get my child to take a nap at home? This is one of the questions I'm asked frequently. Though I don't have a magic wand or a secret potion, I do have some strategies to share that might be helpful.

PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR NAP TIME

- **Establish a consistent routine** - provides structure and a cue that it's sleep time
- **Read a story** - choose books that have a calming, yet engaging theme



- **Massage your baby** - reduces stress and encourages relaxation
- **Swaddle your infant** - protects from startle reflex so they'll stay asleep longer

CREATE AN OPTIMAL SPACE FOR NAP TIME

- **Make it quiet** - plush furnishings, carpets and area rugs are excellent for sound absorption; a white noise machine can be helpful
- **Make it dark** - turn off the lights and close the curtains; this will reduce distractions and create an environment that fosters sleep; if your child is afraid of the dark, use a dim, warm-colored nightlight
- **Make it calm** - sing lullabies or play soft, classical music to ease your child into sleep
- **Make it cozy** - a supportive mattress, soft blankets, pillows or a favorite stuffed animal can help your child feel relaxed and comfortable

Parents also ask, "How many naps does my child need?" Several resources recommend the following:

- 0-4 months—3-5 naps daily
- 4-12 months—2-3 naps daily
- 1-2 year—1-2 naps daily
- 2-3 years—1 nap daily
- 4-5 years—1 nap daily

Though many children stop taking naps between the ages of 3-5, having rest time each day can be beneficial. Naptime is an opportunity for children to recharge their bodies and brains, so they wake up refreshed, eager to learn and ready to embrace the world with wonder yet again.



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