



Tips to tame the bedtime battles

Having a hard time getting your children to bed? It might be time for a new bedtime routine.

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Trouble getting up and rolling in time to catch the bus? Maybe it's time to re-examine your bedtime routines.¹ Michigan State University Extension recommends a predictable, consistent bedtime routine for children of all ages.

A bedtime routine is the first step to creating a smooth morning for children of all ages. A typical bedtime routine might consist of a bath, snack, teeth brushing and reading a book (or two) before being tucked in for the night. Think about what is currently working, or not working, with your routine. Perhaps dinners are pushed back too late to allow for transition time after dinner. Or, maybe you struggle getting everyone into bed, but then they enjoy their quiet reading before lights out. Once you have identified what is and isn't working for your family, it's time to revamp the routine with some new goals in mind.

Follow these tips to tame the bedtime battles bedtime.

- **Make sure children are sleeping enough:** Experts recommend children in preschool get about 11-12 hours of sleep and school-age children get about 10 hours of sleep. For school-age children who must be up by 7 a.m., this means lights out no later than 9 p.m. Preschoolers should be hitting the hay as early as 7 p.m. in order to get enough rest. What time do your children need to be awake in the morning? Are you aiming for an early enough bedtime? Once you establish what time your children need to be falling asleep, back up an hour to an hour and a half to allow for sufficient time to complete the bedtime routine. This might require adjusting your typical evening accordingly.
- **Set a bedtime routine:** Include your preschool and school-age children when deciding the order of the bedtime routine. Perhaps they prefer to shower in the morning, or read their books together on the couch instead of in bed. The more control and buy-in a child has to the routine, the less likely they are to object. Once the order of the routine is established, it's time to put it down on paper. Older children often like a checklist that they can check off as they proceed. Younger children can benefit from a picture routine. Images, either cut from a magazine or actual photographs of your child can be a great way for a child to learn what is coming next. When children protest that they are hungry, for example, you can refer back to the routine to show what they have already completed.
- **Follow the routine:** Once your bedtime routine is established, it's time to set it in motion! Allow time for children to transition to the new bedtime routines, but remain consistent in your expectations. If certain problems tend to keep popping up, consider where an adaptation might need to be made. Look for ways to anticipate your children's needs, for instance, a child who is out of bed for water every night might just need a glass of water on the bedside table.
- **Stick to it:** It can be tempting to abandon the routine on weekends or special nights like birthdays. Rather than skipping the whole routine, adjust the time as needed, but stick with the same, familiar pattern. Children feel a sense of security and comfort in knowing what is coming next.

Remember as you are setting your routine to include time for reading. MSU Extension recommends children engage in at least thirty minutes of literacy activities every day. Even older children who can read themselves, benefit from having a story read to them. There are many chapter books that make for great family read-aloud books.

Take time to work with your children on establishing bedtime routines. With a little advance planning and persistence, you can turn your bedtime battle into sweet dreams for both you and your child!

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