

What can I do if my child won't sleep?

If your child can't fall asleep or stay a sleep, this can be quite normal according to [parents.actionforchildren.org.uk](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk). However, when children do need extra support, here are some ways you can help them feel calm and sleepy.

Check their basic needs are met

Children will sometimes struggle to sleep if they have an unmet physical need. You can:

- Make sure they've been to the toilet.
- Check meal and snack times aren't throwing off their sleep schedule – they could be too hungry or too full.
- Keep some water within reach in case they are thirsty.

Make sure they're tired

Avoid long naps in the afternoon or too close to bedtime. Make sure your child gets plenty of activity during the day so they're tired by bedtime.

Sleep environment

Your child will find it easier to fall asleep within certain conditions.

Light

Darkness helps your child create melatonin, which promote sleep. Many children sleep better with blackout blinds and curtains.

However, young children can be afraid of total darkness. It can help to use a small nightlight or leave a door left ajar.

Temperature

If the room where your child is sleeping is too hot or too cold, they might struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep.

- If the room is too hot, opening a window for a while can help.
- If it's too cold, try giving your child an extra blanket or a specialist microwaveable soft toy.

If your child wakes up a lot at night, check if their feet are cold. This is a quick way to tell if they are too cold when they are sleeping, which could be why they are waking up.

Noise

Try to shut out as much noise as you can.

If there is a lot of noise coming from outside, calming music or white noise can help to distract from this. Some children also find these gentle sounds more comforting than silence.

Familiarity

Try spending more time in the place where they sleep during the day. Feeling happy and safe in the environment helps them sleep there. Let them choose their own bedding, or perhaps a special pillow.

Think about sleep routines

A consistent routine can help your child fall asleep quickly, but remember this takes time and practice.

Decide what time your child needs to be asleep, then start a 'winding down' routine 20 minutes before. Bring this forward by a few minutes each week until you get the bedtime you want.

Set a limit on how much time you spend with your child when you put them to bed. For example, read only one story. If your child gets up, keep taking them back to bed with as little fuss as possible.

Techniques to try

If your child is still struggling to sleep, there are some books and activities that can help.

Meditation exercises

Yoga and breathing exercises can help both you and your child to feel relaxed.

- [Watch 'Goodnight Body' with Elmo and Headspace – YouTube](#)
- [Relax like a cat – guided meditation for children \[PDF\]](#)
- [Goodnight Yoga by Mariam Gates – World of Books](#)

Sticker rewards

Sticker charts can help supporting your child to sleep in their own bed. Start with rewards for small, achievable things, like just getting into bed. Move up over time to rewards for staying in bed longer.

Our article on [understanding my child's behaviour](#) explains the difference between rewards and bribes.

Separation anxiety

If your child struggles with being apart from you at bedtime, try giving them something that reminds them of you or smells like you.

There are also some books that can help, like [The Invisible String by Patrice Karst](#) and [The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn](#).

Talk about their fears

If your child feels worried or anxious about something, this can stop them sleeping. Talk about their fears, and reassure them you're close by.

- [How can I help my child share their worries?](#)
- [What can I do if my child has nightmares?](#)
- [Activities to help with anxiety](#)
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Look after your own wellbeing

Children can pick up on a parent's stress and anxiety, which can affect their own sleep. Make sure you are taking time out for yourself when you need to.

[Coping with parental burnout](#)

Notice what's causing issues over time

If your child is struggling to sleep over a long period of time, look for patterns to understand what's causing difficulties. Try using a [sleep diary to help with this](#).

Get extra support

Most children have trouble sleeping every now and then – it's usually nothing to worry about. If you feel you have tried everything but your child still won't sleep, talk to your GP for advice.

If your child is autistic or has ADHD, you might need more tailored support. About 80% of autistic children and 50% of children with ADHD have sleep issues. Speak to a GP or paediatrician to see if they can help – they might refer you to a sleep clinic.

Cerebra also offers a [sleep advice service via telephone](#).



working together to keep our children safe and happy.