

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S SLEEP

Research has shown that for rejuvenating sleep, adults and children move through all the stages of sleep several. We waken to light sleep several times a night and drift off into deep sleep without remembering. Your natural rhythm is internally driven but can be affected by the level and duration of light, timing of meals and habits. Babies tend to spend less time in deep sleep states. Understanding and identifying sleep stages will assist you to deal with some of the sleep issues that occur with children. Interruptions to the progressive and normal flow through the sleep stages may mean that the self soothing and settling needs to begin again. This is particularly troublesome if your child is just learning to put themselves to sleep or is having disturbing dreams. Lack of sleep can cause: Irritability, exaggerated emotions, increased aggression, hyperactivity, concentration and memory problems, depression, physical and coordination problems, ongoing or escalating night terrors, inability to nap and poor sleeping habits.

STAGES	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH OF SLEEP	WHAT YOU WILL SEE	THINGS THAT HELP
Pre-sleep	Drowsy	Sleepy and dreamy state	Relaxed and quiet. May regain a boost of energy and alertness or drift into stage 1	Establish a regular routine and wind down time. Teach your child how to relax and settle.
Stage 1	Drifting off into very light sleep	Dozing and falling asleep but easily wakened.	Floating sensation, relaxed muscles, slow heart and breathing rates, eyes may roll back and there may be some jerking movement as the muscles relax further.	Some children wake easily or resist sleep. Keep the noise and activity in the house low and quiet without moving your child. Try to establish a plan with a consistent routine where the child self settles without elaborate conditions. In your sleep plan allow for a short protest but try to avoid long periods of crying.
Stage 2	Light sleep	Easily awakened	Regular relaxed breathing, body relaxed and preparing to enter deep sleep	Lack of these restorative sleep stages may leave you and your child chronically sleep deprived. Children sleep longer in these stages earlier in the night, wakening more frequently towards early morning.
Stage 3	Deep sleep	Difficult to awaken	Regular relaxed breathing, may wet the bed, walk or talk in sleep or have night terrors	REM sleep is crucial for all ages. It is thought that dreaming sorts and clears the brain and psyche. The longer they sleep the more cycles of deep and REM sleep leaving them more refreshed.
Stage 4	Deepest sleep	Difficult to wake, groggy /disoriented when wakened	Slow regular breathing no eye movement, muscles still and relaxed, bed wetting, sleep walking and talking	Allow them to waken slowly. Research indicates that if your child takes more than a few minutes to fully waken then they may not be getting enough sleep.
Stage 5	Rapid Eye Movement REM	May be easy or difficult to waken – varies with the person	Muscles and limbs still, heart and breathing rates irregular, eyes move quickly under the lids (REM)	
Stage 6	Inactive and Sleepy	Awakening	May be sleepy, groggy, disoriented, confused, sluggish and slow to respond	

Table Adapted from: *The no-cry sleep solution for toddlers and preschoolers. Elizabeth Pantley 2005 p5*

References: *Brain Basics: Understanding Sleep. 2014. http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/understanding_sleep.htm*