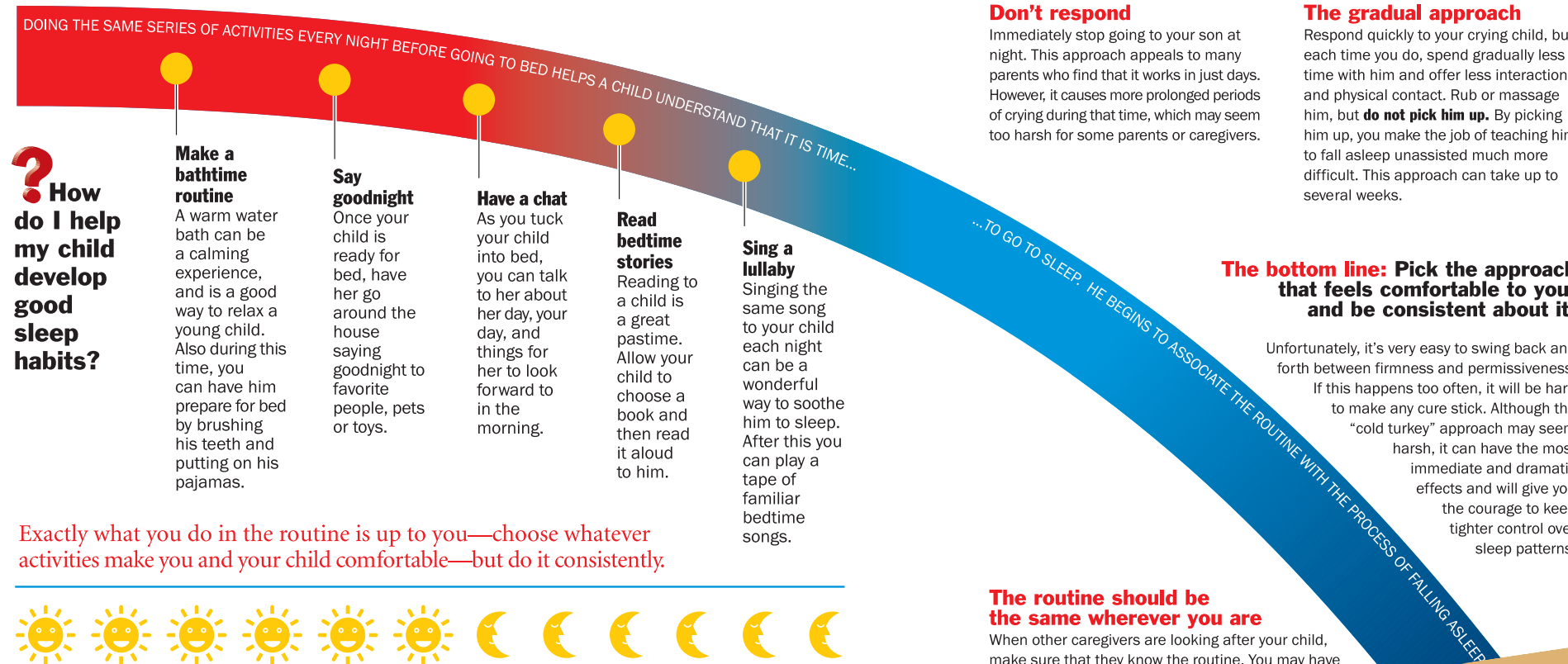


The most important thing in establishing good sleep habits is **routine**.
If you establish a consistent bedtime routine early in your child's life, you will go a long way towards eliminating the possibility of sleep problems later.



? How do I help my child develop good sleep habits?

Make a bedtime routine

A warm water bath can be a calming experience, and is a good way to relax a young child. Also during this time, you can have him prepare for bed by brushing his teeth and putting on his pajamas.

Say goodnight

Once your child is ready for bed, have her go around the house saying goodnight to favorite people, pets or toys.

Have a chat

As you tuck your child into bed, you can talk to her about her day, your day, and things for her to look forward to in the morning.

Read bedtime stories

Reading to a child is a great pastime. Allow your child to choose a book and then read it aloud to him.

Sing a lullaby

Singing the same song to your child each night can be a wonderful way to soothe him to sleep. After this you can play a tape of familiar bedtime songs.

Exactly what you do in the routine is up to you—choose whatever activities make you and your child comfortable—but do it consistently.



Distinguish between day and night

Newborns don't pay attention to the time of day; they just sleep and eat around the clock. But you can start teaching the difference between morning and evening, naptime and bedtime, when your baby is just a few weeks old.

During the day, play with her, talk to her, and wake her for feedings. Keep daytime noises at the normal level and keep the house, including her room, sunny and bright.

At night, turn down the lights, noises and conversation when you feed and change her. Eventually she'll begin to understand that day is for play and night is to sleep tight.

? How should I respond to my one-year-old's persistent crying when I put him down to sleep or when he wakes up during the night?

Here are **two ways** to deal with this:

Don't respond

Immediately stop going to your son at night. This approach appeals to many parents who find that it works in just days. However, it causes more prolonged periods of crying during that time, which may seem too harsh for some parents or caregivers.

The gradual approach

Respond quickly to your crying child, but each time you do, spend gradually less time with him and offer less interaction and physical contact. Rub or massage him, but **do not pick him up**. By picking him up, you make the job of teaching him to fall asleep unassisted much more difficult. This approach can take up to several weeks.

The bottom line: Pick the approach that feels comfortable to you, and be consistent about it.

Unfortunately, it's very easy to swing back and forth between firmness and permissiveness. If this happens too often, it will be hard to make any cure stick. Although the "cold turkey" approach may seem harsh, it can have the most immediate and dramatic effects and will give you the courage to keep tighter control over sleep patterns.

The routine should be the same wherever you are

When other caregivers are looking after your child, make sure that they know the routine. You may have to lay down the law for them as well as your child! If you are divorced, the routine must be the same in both homes.

On vacation, it may be difficult to keep up your routine. Try to establish actions that correspond in some way to your child's normal bedtime routine.



How do I help my child develop good sleep habits?

Be sensitive to your child's sleep needs and establish good sleep habits from the beginning.

Deciding how long you should let your child cry requires sensitivity to your child's needs, persistence and flexibility.

Sources: BabyCenter.com; Healthy Sleep Happy Child, Marc Weissbluth, MD.

ACTION ITEMS

Good bedtime practices

- 1 Start when your child is young.** Healthy sleep is a habit, just like healthy eating habits, which are learned. The sooner you put into practice these rules, the earlier you can teach your child healthy sleeping habits and prevent many common sleeping problems.
- 2 Pay attention to signs that your child is growing tired.** Putting your child to bed when she first shows signs of becoming tired may help her go to sleep with less fuss or crying. Learn to recognize certain behaviors, which signal that she is becoming tired, such as loss of interest in favorite games and toys and tendencies to become quiet and less active.
- 3 Don't neglect naps.** Naps are as critical to healthy cognitive, emotional and physical development as night sleep. Naps lead to optimal daytime alertness and can help your child sleep easier at night. As much as possible, try and stick to a consistent nap schedule every day.
- 4 Adhere to an early bedtime.** Your child may have an easier time falling asleep if she goes to sleep earlier, before she has a chance to become overtired, and she may sleep later in the morning. Often, moving up a bedtime by just 20 or 30 minutes can make a difference.
- 5 Start early.** Begin your bedtime routine about thirty minutes before bedtime. This will help you and your baby to relax and enjoy the winding down process.
- 6 Be consistent.** Using a consistent soothing style will help your child settle down and get ready to go to sleep. You might try bathing, listening to music, reading a book, feeding, rocking, singing or massaging. Pick a style of soothing that makes you feel comfortable and stick to it. By creating consistent bedtime routines, you teach him how to soothe himself to sleep.
- 7 Say good night.** After you complete your bedtime routine, say good night, close the door and walk away—even if your child cries in protest. How long you allow the protest crying to continue depends upon your own comfort level.