

Eyes on



Sleeping behaviour

Good sleep, for good growth



CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Early Childhood Development

PARENTS



“If sleep problems are not treated during early childhood (0 to 5 years), they will persist for a long time.”

What do we know?

- Setting up a day/night schedule depends on the maturity of the child’s brain and on the environment (such as sound, temperature, routines, and the family environment).
- A baby’s sleep is made of alternating periods of agitation (rapid and irregular breathing, agitation, short cries, eye movements) and of calm (slow and regular breathing, few eye movements).
- As children become older, they sleep less:
 - Newborns sleep about 16 hours out of 24.
 - Around the age of 3-4 months, babies sleep more at night and stay awake longer during the day.
 - A 1-year-old child will sleep around 6 to 8 hours each night, with 2 or 3 short periods of being awake.
 - By the age of 5, the child will sleep around 10 to 12 hours a night.
- 20% to 30% of children between the ages of 0 to 3 years are considered to be poor sleepers (waking up often, crying, having trouble getting back to sleep, making repeated demands, etc.).
- If sleep problems are not treated during early childhood (0 to 5 years), they will persist for a long time.
- Poor sleep in early childhood has a negative effect on brain development, physical growth, behaviour, moods, emotions, memory, success at school, and the well-being of the parents and family.
- The quality of the child’s sleep is influenced not only by the child’s temperament but also those of the parents, the parent-child relationship, illness, pain, stress, etc.
- If parents let their child sleep in their bed or try too hard to comfort their child at bedtime and when the child wakes up at night (for example, by staying nearby until the child falls back to sleep), it can create sleep problems or make them worse.
- Putting babies to sleep on their backs, breastfeeding, and being careful not to expose them to cigarette smoke are ways of reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... the signs of sleep problems (such as snoring, waking up often in the night, being sleepy during the day, etc.).

- Ask for help to be well-informed, prepared, and supported in your interventions.

... the child's environment.

From the very first days:

- Make sure there is an alternation between natural light and dark to get the child use to a day/night schedule.
- Keep activities on a regular schedule (for example, meal times, play times, going to bed, and getting up in the morning).
- Set up sleep habits that are suited to the child's individual needs as well as to the family situation and culture.

... the child's behaviour at bedtime.

- From the first months, help the child develop the habit of calming himself down at bedtime.
- Adjust bedtime depending on when the child naturally falls asleep.
- When the child can't sleep, take the child out of bed and keep him awake.

... the child's level of fatigue.

... how parents handle their child's sleeping.

- Make sure your expectations are realistic for the age of the child.
- Before bedtime, do activities that are calm and pleasant.
- Set up clear rules about the time for going to bed and make sure the child respects them (from the age of 3 years).
- Keep up the interventions, even if they seem to make the problem worse in the beginning.

... sleep problems that persist even after sustained and supervised interventions.

- See a doctor.

... signs that require immediate medical attention (such as temporary pauses in breathing during sleep).



Information

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on the social and emotional development of young children. It disseminates this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

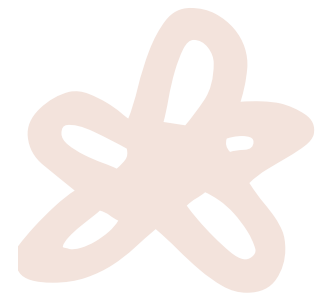
For a more in-depth understanding of sleeping behaviour, consult our experts' articles in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

This information sheet is published by the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, one of four Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being. Funding for the Centres of Excellence is provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors/researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We are grateful to the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon for its financial contribution to produce this information sheet.

Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

GRIP-Université de Montréal
P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-ville
Montreal (Quebec) H3C 3J7
Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2576
Fax: 514.343.6962
E-mail: cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca
Website: www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca



Coordinator:
Kristell Le Martret

Collaborator:
Dominique Petit

Copy editor:
Sandra Braun

Translation:
Donna Riley

Graphic design:
DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.

In this document, the masculine form is used to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended