



# First Steps

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## Bedtime Battles

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Toddlers and children in the preschool years need daily habits—including those routines that bring the day to a peaceful end. Most parents know the frustration of a child who won't go to bed, but there are ways to make routines easy to bring children and parents to the end of the day without upsetting anyone. As children grow, using routines can stop some of the problems that often go with daily life. Routines are different from family to family, but there are reasonable ways to take the struggle out of going to bed.

Source: Nelsen, Erwin, and Duffy, *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers*

### Establish Bedtime Routines

**Snack time:** Offer a small, low-sugar snack (like graham crackers and milk) to make sure your child does not go to bed feeling hungry.

**Bath time:** Soak your child in a warm, soothing bath. The feel and sound of warm water helps most children relax.

**Teeth time:** Be sure to include cleaning your child's teeth as a part of the nightly bedtime routine. This helps to begin the habits of good oral care.



**Quiet time:** Play a board game or a floor game that does not involve a lot of action. Avoid television at this time of day.

**Talk time:** Children feel cozy and warm just before they fall asleep, so this would be a great time to share thoughts about the day. Simply ask, "What was the best part of your day?"

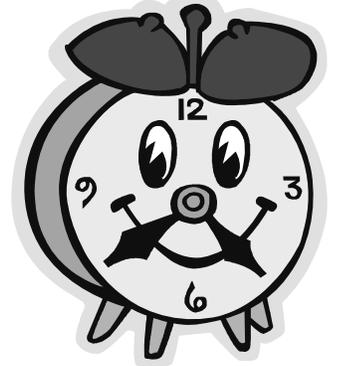
**Story time:** Young children love to hear stories whether they are read from books or made up by the parents. Listening to a story further helps a child relax and settle in to the bedtime routine.

**Cuddle time:** As you read to your child, hold him close to reassure him that he will be safe when you leave the room and he goes to sleep.

**Hugs and kisses time:** Bedtime is the ideal time for tender reassurances of love. A daily dose of hugs and kisses encourages good emotional health.

## What Are the Benefits of Bedtime Routines?

- Setting up fixed bedtime routines for infants, toddlers, and preschool children helps to make evenings go well. Children like routines because routines give them a feeling of security—they know what to look forward to day to day.
- A bedtime routine also helps to set a specific time for children to go to bed. Children who get regular and plenty of sleep are usually healthier and happier children.
- Being flexible for special occasions is understandable, but regular schedules and practices to prepare children for going to bed helps to create peace in the home.
- Spending those special minutes with a child before his/her bedtime helps to build an emotional bond between the parent and the child. Children who feel loved and cared for are emotionally healthier all through their lives.
- Having and practicing the bedtime routine early in a child's life is a help not only to the child, but also to the parents. Children depend on certain things happening on a daily (or nightly) basis. Parents also can depend on their children being in bed by a certain time each night so they (the parents) can have some time for themselves without having to meet the needs of their children.



## Winding Down at the End of the Day....

Remember that actually falling asleep is something your child has to do by herself. Your job as a parent is to make the change from being awake to being asleep as peaceful and smooth as possible. Make sure children are wearing comfortable pajamas and have a safe bed with good blankets. A light bedtime snack may make your child more relaxed and allow him to sleep without being hungry. Once a routine is started, do your best to stick to it for your comfort and your child's comfort. Practice the routines enough so they become habits that bring the end of the day to a peaceful close. Make bedtime a special part of the day that you spend with your child instead of a battle that upsets everyone.



*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*