

Managing Your Child's Sleep Part Two

The first part of maintaining healthy sleep habits once your child is sleeping independently, is making age appropriate adjustments to your child's schedule and allow for the interference of developmental milestones.

The second part is anticipating common interruptions to your child's schedule on a regular basis. Parents need to have a management plan for when sleep schedules are disrupted due to vacation, illness, doctor's appointments, and/or play dates.

Vacation or Hosting Company

If you are traveling out of town it is a good idea to prepare and plan for how you will handle your child's sleep. Pack important sleep items that your child likes to have with him while he sleeps. If your child will be sharing a room with you while you travel consider ways to separate you from your child. Some hotel rooms have large closets, bathrooms or small coves that fit a crib perfectly. If feasible, consider hotel suites, which makes this separating easier. Also, consider bringing a noise machine made for traveling, so your movements and sounds will not disrupt your child while he is sleeping. The other option is to co-sleep for part or all of the night if that will help everyone to sleep better.

While traveling try to honor your child's sleep schedule as much as possible. Afternoons can be a great time for the entire family to take a siesta and have quiet time. If a nap is missed then try to get your child to bed earlier that evening. Also, keep your sleep rituals the same as at home. This will help make the transition to sleep much easier for your child.

The first full day or night you are at home from your trip *immediately* return to your regular routine. The child should sleep in his crib or bed at his normal times. He will learn the difference between "vacation sleep" and "home sleep".

If you are hosting company at your house then try to adhere to your child's schedule as much as possible. Remember, the more quality sleep your child gets the more fun he will be to play with and take on outings.

Illness

When your child is sick then her schedule revolves around her needs. Allow her to sleep when she is able and comfort her in any way that is helpful. If you want to

bring your child into bed with you or sleep in her room with her that is fine. Parents need to do what works best for the family to get as much sleep through the illness as possible. Once your child is eating and playing normally then *immediately* return to your normal sleep schedule. She may protest at first, but if you are consistent and firm it will be very short lived. Your child will soon learn the difference between what happens when she is sick and what is expected of her when she is healthy.

Miscellaneous Disruptions

Try to schedule your doctors' appointments, errands, and/or play dates around your child's sleep schedule as much as possible. I recommend keeping to the schedule 5 days/week. It is important that parents strike a balance between feeling trapped by their child's schedule and honoring their child's sleep needs. If your child misses a morning nap then put him down 15 to 30 minutes earlier for the afternoon nap. If the afternoon nap is missed then put your child down earlier at bedtime. Overall, as with vacation, it is best to not dismiss a child's sleep schedule for an entire day, i.e., skip naps and put to bed very late. This quickly sets your child up for feeling quite overtired making it harder and longer for your child to recover from that type of sleep loss.

When handling any disruption in your child's sleep schedule, whether it is for a day or over a period of time, it is critical to return to a normal schedule once you are able. If you do not return to the schedule *immediately* then this confuses the child. Starting at a very young age, babies learn the difference between daytime sleep and nighttime sleep, vacation sleep and sickness sleep versus at home, healthy sleep. If these lines are clearly drawn consistently for every disruption then the faster your child will quickly learn what is expected and protest less.