How to Promote Healthy Sleep Habits for Infants and Children
Written by: Kim Schaf, M.A.T.

Getting a child to settle down and get ready for bed is oftentimes a BIG challenge for parents. Depending on the age of the child, it may be due to a fear of missing out on something fun, a fear of being in the dark, or just wanting to be more in control of things. Many times, however, it is simply because a child does not have the skills to fall asleep on his or her own and bedtime becomes a frustrating part of the day. Becoming an independent sleeper is a skill, and many children need help developing this ability.

Teaching healthy sleep habits early on is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child. Children (and adults) who have good quality consolidated sleep every night have increased daytime alertness, creativity, memory recall, and motivation and are in a better mood overall. Parents are also rewarded with a pleasant bedtime, reduced or eliminated night-wakings, and an age-appropriate wake-up time in the morning when their child has learned healthy sleep habits.

Some suggestions for promoting healthy sleep habits include:

* Knowing your child’s **ideal bedtime**, which is before your child starts showing signs of tiredness. Miss this window, and your child may catch a second wind!
* Removing external **sleep props** (i.e. a pacifier or nursing to sleep) so your child can start learning how to fall asleep independently.
* Developing a pleasant **bedtime routine** to cue the body that it is time to settle down. Some elements for a quieting routine include bath time, drawing the shades or curtains, reading stories, singing songs, and nursing or having a bottle.
* Being **consistent** with your child’s bedtime and routine.
* **Not letting your child fall asleep during the routine**. By rocking or nursing your child to sleep, you are doing all of the work for your child!
* Keeping an eye on your child’s **sugar and caffeine consumption**, especially during the afternoon hours.

As your child learns how to fall asleep independently, bedtime will naturally become an easier and more enjoyable time of the day.