

# Sleep and settling for early childhood

## Factsheet 5: Typical sleep behaviour: toddlers 2–3 years



## Summary

- Some toddlers may still wake at night and will need you to comfort them, especially if they have night-time fears.
- At this age, toddlers generally sleep 12 – 13 hours in a 24-hour period, including daytime naps of one to two hours.
- Once you notice your toddler attempting to climb out of their cot, it is time to move them to a bed. This usually happens around 2-3½ years but can be as early as 18 months.

## Sleep patterns and behaviours

Between the ages of two and three years, toddlers often sleep 12–13 hours in a 24-hour period.

This includes one to two hours during the day, which helps to promote optimal learning and development.

A number of sleep-related changes commonly occur in this age group. This includes:

- a decrease in daytime naps
- longer periods of sleep overnight
- often a decrease in night waking.

## Sleep rhythms

Around this time your toddler may reduce the number and length of daytime naps.

As toddlers' brains are developing quickly, they may develop night-time fears, and they may need additional comfort.

They may still resist going to sleep at night and want to stay up with the family.

## Settling

By understanding and connecting with your toddler you will learn their cues and be able to support positive sleep patterns.

Routines and environments play a big part in helping toddlers get to sleep – they need a cue to tell them when it is sleep time, which is usually something in their external environment. It could be a dark room or having familiar objects around them.

Limiting screen time at night and having a regular bedtime routine, such as bath, book, song and bed, can help to prevent and reduce settling difficulties and waking at night.

Some strategies you can use to develop positive sleep behaviour include:

- recognising and responding to **tired signs**
- using positive and consistent **bedtime routines**

- using your presence as a safety signal to reduce your baby’s anxiety by sleeping in their room - **parental presence**
- try to reduce night waking in older toddlers by using your child’s natural tendency to sleep for the right length of time (called sleep homeostasis) by delaying bedtime by 15 minutes each night in order to reduce the time your toddler spends sleeping - **bedtime fading**

If you are worried about your toddlers sleep and settling, track how long and when your toddler is sleeping, every day for a week or so.

This can give you a clear idea of what might be going on.

If you are still concerned after you have tried different approaches for one to two weeks, talk to your maternal and child health nurse, doctor or call the Maternal and Child Health Line on Tel: 13 22 29.

To learn more about each of the things in this list, download ‘Factsheet 9: Preventing sleep concerns: toddlers 1–3 years’ and ‘Factsheet 12: Solutions to sleep concerns: toddlers 1–3 years’ from the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

## Cot to bed transition

Once you notice your toddler is attempting to climb out of their cot, it is time to transition them to a bed. This is usually between 2 and 3 ½ years of age but can be as early as 18 months.

It is important to make sure that the home and bed is safe for your toddler. This includes items like cords from blinds, power points and stairs. They should be protected to prevent your toddler from accessing them and hurting themselves, should they get out of bed whilst you are asleep.

Information on how to safely transition your toddler is available on Red Nose website, [moving from cot to bed](https://rednose.org.au/downloads/RN3356_Cot_Bed_DL_Oct2018_web.pdf) <[https://rednose.org.au/downloads/RN3356\\_Cot\\_Bed\\_DL\\_Oct2018\\_web.pdf](https://rednose.org.au/downloads/RN3356_Cot_Bed_DL_Oct2018_web.pdf)>

Moving from a cot to a bed can bring about new difficulties at bedtime, and toddlers in this age group may go through a stage of calling out or getting out of bed.

To receive this form in an accessible format [email Maternal and Child Health and Parenting](mailto:MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <[MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:MCH@dhhs.vic.gov.au)>.

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Available at the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/child-health>>.

This factsheet is based on research undertaken by KPMG on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services. The research included a comprehensive overview of contemporary research, and evidence-based approaches and interventions for sleep and settling in early childhood. It considered developmentally appropriate strategies and cultural diversity. Download the full research report from the [MCH Service webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health>>.