

7-Day Sleep Reset Planner

A structured week-by-week plan for fixing broken toddler sleep habits

This plan works for toddlers and preschoolers (18 months to 5 years) who have developed unsustainable sleep habits — endless curtain calls, sleeping in your bed, 90-minute bedtime battles. Pick a start date when you can commit to 7 consecutive nights. Consistency is the entire strategy. Half-measures make it worse.

IMPORTANT

Before starting: rule out medical causes of poor sleep. Enlarged adenoids/tonsils, sleep apnea, iron deficiency, eczema, and undiagnosed reflux can all cause sleep disruption that no behavioral plan will fix. See your pediatrician first if your child snores, mouth-breathes, or has restless sleep.

Pre-Reset: Preparation Day (Day 0)

- Complete the Sleep Environment Audit (fix the room first)
 - Set a consistent bedtime (aim for 7:00–7:30 PM for toddlers, 7:30–8:00 PM for preschoolers)
 - Write down your new bedtime routine (keep it under 30 minutes)
 - Explain the new plan to your child in simple, positive terms — 'Starting tonight, we're going to do bedtime a new way. You're going to learn to fall asleep in your own bed like a big kid.'
 - Both parents (and any caregivers) agree on the plan and the response to protests
 - Remove the things that aren't working from the routine — If you've been lying with them for 45 minutes, that stops tonight. Not gradually. Tonight.
 - Get an OK-to-wake clock if they don't have one
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Day 1–2: Establish the New Normal

These are the hardest nights. Your child will test every boundary because the old system is gone and the new one isn't proven yet. This is expected and temporary.

Evening Routine

- 1 Dim lights and stop all screens by 6:00–6:30 PM.
- 2 Start the bedtime routine at the same time both nights (e.g., 6:45 PM).

- 3 Follow the routine in order: bath/wash up > pajamas > brush teeth > 1-2 books > goodnight phrase > lights out.
- 4 Keep the routine warm but efficient. No extra books, no extra songs, no negotiation.
- 5 Say your goodnight phrase ('I love you, it's time to sleep, I'll see you in the morning') and leave the room.

When they protest, come out of bed, or call for you: return them to bed calmly, repeat the goodnight phrase, and leave. No new conversation. No new water. No new hugs. Brief, boring, consistent. The first night may take 45-90 minutes. The second night is usually slightly better.

Day 1 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 2 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 3-4: Hold the Line

Many children escalate on night 3 — this is called an 'extinction burst.' They try harder because the old tactics almost worked before. If you give in on night 3, you've taught them that persistence wins. This is the critical point.

Focus Areas

- 1 Same routine, same times, same words. No variation.
- 2 If they come out of the room, silently walk them back. No talking beyond the goodnight phrase.
- 3 If they cry, check in briefly every 10-15 minutes (in the doorway, 10 seconds, then leave). Don't pick them up or sit down.
- 4 Keep wake-up time consistent too. Use the OK-to-wake clock. Don't start the day before the light turns on.
- 5 Nap timing should match the schedule from the Toddler Sleep Schedule tool.

Night 3 is the hinge. If you're consistent through night 3, most children show dramatic improvement by night 4-5. If you caved on night 3, you reset to zero and the next attempt will be harder.

Day 3 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 4 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 5–6: Improvement and Testing

By night 5, most children are falling asleep within 15–20 minutes. Night wakes are down. They may test once or twice, but without conviction. Stay consistent. Don't celebrate early and loosen up.

Focus Areas

- 1 Continue the identical routine.
- 2 Start praising morning behavior: 'You stayed in your bed all night! That's amazing.'
- 3 Consider a simple reward chart: sticker for each night they stay in bed. Small reward at 5 stickers.
- 4 If they're waking early (before 6 AM), make sure the room is dark enough and they're not napping too long.
- 5 Don't add anything back to the routine yet. No extra book, no 'just one more hug.' Keep it clean.

Day 5 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 6 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

Day 7: Consolidation

By night 7, the new pattern should be forming. Bedtime resistance is minimal, night wakes are rare or brief, and your child is learning that the routine is the routine.

Day 7 Assessment

- Falls asleep within 20 minutes of lights out
- Staying in bed/room without repeated curtain calls
- Night wakes have decreased (or are shorter)
- Morning wake time is consistent (within 30 minutes)
- Naps are happening without major battles
- Both parents are still consistent with the plan

Day 7 — Bedtime / Protests / Fell asleep at / Night wakes / Notes

After the Reset: Maintenance Rules

- 1 Keep the bedtime routine identical for at least 4 more weeks. Consistency is what makes it stick.
- 2 Don't reintroduce lying with them, extra books, or other habits that were part of the old problem.
- 3 Expect regressions after illness, travel, time changes, and new siblings. When they happen, go back to the Day 1-2 protocol immediately. Don't let 'just this once' become a new habit.
- 4 If they're sick, comfort them. But return to the routine as soon as they're better — ideally the first night they're well.
- 5 Continue the OK-to-wake clock for at least 6 months. It becomes their internal cue for when night is over.

If you've completed all 7 days consistently and there's no improvement, revisit whether there's a medical factor (snoring, restless legs, mouth breathing) or whether the schedule itself needs adjusting (too much or too little daytime sleep).