

Disability Campaign.org

10 Bedtime Tips for Special Needs Parenting

1. **Lighting.** Some kids prefer it pitch black, others like having some light.



- Try a plug-in-the-wall nightlight.
- Stick glow-in-the-dark adhesive stars to your ceiling or walls.
- A Himalayan salt lamp provides a more natural glow at night.
- Experiment with different colored light bulbs.
- Consider buying an alarm clock with a wake-up light that has a sunrise/sundown effect.

2. **Blanketing.** Like adults, kids have trouble sleeping if it's too hot or cold, but children with autism or other special needs may be pickier when it comes to blankets.

- Ensure that the material is not too noisy or itchy for your child.
- Change bedding according to the season and your child's preferred comfort level.
- Weighted blankets can help children with sensory issues by providing a hug-like feel.



3. **Safety.** If your child tends get in and out of bed often at night, make sure the bedroom setting and furniture are safe.

- Keep toys off the floor, as they can be a trip hazard.
- Try installing wall lights that activate when a person walks by, or place a night light in hallways or bathrooms.
- Ensure that your child's bed has safety features to prevent falls, such as side-rails. A bunk-bed or raised bed may not be the best option.

4. **Sound.** What one child may find soothing, another may find irritating. Experiment with different sounds and volumes, or try keeping the bedroom quiet and seeing if that works.

- White noise apps or alarm clocks can play soothing sounds while your child sleeps. Some have timers that allow for the sounds to play only for limited amounts of time.
- Make a soothing nighttime playlist and have your child try listening to it before going to bed. Some children like routine, and this may become a favorite!
- Include your child in choosing nighttime music/sounds.

5. **Pajamas.** Below are some options to consider, but if can't get your child to put on pajamas because changing just once a day is already a chore for him/her, it's ok.



- Examine the material, how breathable it is, its level of softness, etc.
- Try tag-less pajamas and cut tags that are itchy or irritating.
- Consider the length and fit of the pajamas. Loose pajamas may move or ride up as your child tosses and turns. Other kids can't stand more fitting clothing.
- Some kids like two-piece pajamas, while others prefer a onesie.

6. **Toys and Stuffed Animals.** These will vary based on your child's interests, but in general:

- Remove any distracting toys from the bedroom so your child is less tempted to get up and play. These include video game consoles and computers.
- Provide your child with a stuffed animal or "blankie."

7. Timing. It may be hard, but try sticking to a schedule.

- As often as possible, put your child to bed at the same time every day.
- Take into consideration how long it takes your child to prepare for bed, such as teeth brushing or nighttime baths.
- Experiment with different wake-up options, such as waking up to light, sound, or a certain activity.

8. Relaxation. If your child is too active, his/her body and mind may have trouble winding down at night.

- Try aromatherapy to calm the senses.
- Nighttime baths can be very soothing for some children.
- A car ride around the block can help put a child to sleep.
- Ask your child what he or she finds soothing, and try incorporating it into his or her evening routine.



9. Measuring sleep. How do you know your child's getting a full night's rest?

- Try a sleep-tracking device for children.
- Use an app that monitors sleep.
- If you think your child's sleeping problem may be due to a health condition such as sleep apnea or insomnia, talk to your doctor. A sleep study may be necessary to pinpoint the root of the problem.

10. Make sure YOU get sleep too.

- You can't take care of your little one unless you first take care of yourself.
- Make sure you do your best to incorporate healthy sleeping habits into your life.
- If you've noticed an increase in fatigue or achiness, especially when waking up, it may be a sign that you're not sleeping enough or that your quality of sleep has decreased. If so, seek help from a medical professional.

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