

Bedtime

By Elizabeth Verdick

Illustrated by
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Y-A-W-N! It's bedtime . . .

get-ready-for-beddy time.



A little snack
can settle
the tummy.

Mmmm,
yummy!



Bedtime Tips for Parents & Caregivers

- **Create a routine.** Young children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night, so set an early, regular bedtime. An hour before, help calm down your child by turning off the screens and avoiding roughhousing.
- **Offer a snack.** A light snack (milk, turkey, cheese, whole-grain crackers, or banana) can help bring on that sleepy feeling and keep a toddler's tummy full through the night. Avoid sugary foods and drinks.
- **Run a bath.** A warm bath is relaxing; it will clean up your toddler and help him wind down. Keep it short and soothing.
- **Get cozy.** Comfy pajamas (no rough seams or scratchy fabric) are a clear transition into bedtime.
- **Brush teeth.** Young children need help with this, but you can teach them to put the toothpaste on the brush, set a timer for two minutes of brushing, and rinse and spit into the sink.
- **Make bed a special place.** You want your toddler to learn to fall asleep in her own bed—and to stay there all night. Create a cozy space with soft blankets, a nightlight, and a few favorite stuffed animals. Lower the shades, play or sing a lullaby, offer a back rub, and read a soothing bedtime book.
- **Share love.** Gentle words are soothing before bed. Take a moment to look back on the day, say prayers, and whisper “I love you.”



- **Stay patient.** Some children have trouble winding down; they may have excess energy, a fear of the dark, or difficulty separating from a parent at night. Teach the refrain “I do my best growing when I’m sleeping”—a helpful incentive for toddlers who take pride in growing bigger every day.
- **Be firm.** All toddlers stall, whine, or put up a fight from time to time. Stay matter-of-fact and encouraging: “Now you have your jammies on, so climb into bed. Wow, you’re doing a good job of listening.” Don’t give in to another drink of water or *one* more story, or the routine will get off track. Resist the temptation of allowing your toddler to fall asleep in your bed first or staying until your child falls asleep. Self-soothing is an important skill for a young child to learn, one that takes time and patience to teach.

Need more support with bedtime? Talk to friends who have young children, read parenting books or Web sites, or consult your healthcare provider. With a little help and practice, you and your child can both look forward to a better night’s sleep.

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