

Nighttime Awakenings—Checking Method

Nighttime arousals are normal. All children (and adults) wake multiple times every night. Problematic nighttime awakenings occur when your child cannot return to sleep without your help after they have a normal nighttime arousal. To teach your child to return to sleep during the night, you must first teach them to go to sleep independently at bedtime. Once they have learned how to go to sleep without your help, in about 2 weeks, you will see that they start to sleep longer and longer stretches at night without waking. **Keep in mind that this treatment focuses only on bedtime, so your child's nighttime awakenings will continue for at least the next few weeks.**

If you are currently nursing/feeding or rocking your child to sleep, you must first make changes to this behavior. For example, move the nursing/feeding to the first part of your bedtime routine and then rock your child to sleep. After a few nights of rocking your child to sleep, rock them for only a few minutes before placing them in the crib awake. The following provides advice on how to help teach your child to go to sleep at bedtime without your help once you are ready to place your child into the crib awake.

1. **Have a consistent bedtime routine and a consistent bedtime in place.** For your child, this routine should start at _____ p.m. and include the following: _____, and it should end at _____ p.m.
2. **At the end of the routine, you should place your child in their crib drowsy but awake and leave the room.**
3. **You can then check on your child as often as you want, but the longer you can stay out of the room, the better!** If your child gets more upset by your visits, then don't go in as often. For the first few nights you should check on your child every _____. After that, the time between checks should increase by _____ every night.
4. **When you check on your child, the visit should be brief and boring.** These checks are for you to say, "I love you, it's sleeping time!" and to make sure your child is safe and okay.
5. **It is best if you do not pick your child up to comfort them, as they could snuggle into your shoulder and go right to sleep.** Then all they have learned is that if they cry long enough you will "rescue" them. However, if you feel as if your child is past the point where they will be able to calm down without a brief interaction, you may pick them up for a couple of minutes to try and calm them down. However, they must be returned to their crib awake. If when you put them back in the crib they become even more distressed, it may be better in the future to not pick them up again.

Important Things to Remember

- Your child is crying at bedtime because they are tired and know how to go to sleep only with your help. They will still be very happy to see you in the morning and there will be no short-term or long-term damage by doing this sleep training.
- The second night will likely be worse than the first night! While all children are different, most children cry for about 45 minutes the first night at bedtime. On the second night, most children cry for about 90 minutes. By the third night, most children cry about 20 minutes.

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- So, you have to be prepared to do at least 3 nights of this intervention. If you “rescue” your child after prolonged crying and then help them go to sleep (e.g., rocking, nursing), all they have learned is that prolonged crying will get them what they ultimately want, which is you helping them to go to sleep.
- When putting your child in the crib drowsy, it is important they are still awake! On a scale of 0 (not at all drowsy) to 10 (fully asleep) your child should be in the middle (4–6). If they are too drowsy (7+) they may not be learning how to go to sleep in the crib.
- Although unlikely, it is possible that your child will throw up. To prepare, have a second set of sheets on the bed with a pad in between and a second set of pajamas ready to go. If your child vomits, take them out of the crib and remove the dirty sheets, clean them up, and change their pajamas. Then return them to the crib. While this sounds terrible, it is necessary to prevent your child from learning to vomit to get your attention.
- Listening to a baby cry when they are learning to sleep independently is very challenging. Here are some strategies you can use to help yourself manage your frustration, worry, guilt, and irritation (all of which are normal feelings!):
 - take a bath;
 - listen to music;
 - meditate;
 - exercise;
 - talk on the phone;
 - play a game;
 - ask for support from your partner, friends, or family to take turns with you monitoring your child so that you can take a break to have time for yourself. This can also be very helpful for children who need their sleep managed in the middle of the night. Taking turns with a partner can help each of you get much needed rest.

Although challenging, this treatment is very successful as long as you are consistent and follow through with all of the recommended steps. Keep in mind that you are doing this to help your child learn to sleep. The short-term benefit is that both you and your child will start sleeping better. The long-term benefits are numerous, including improved child and caregiver mood, improved caregiver–child interactions, and improved family functioning.
