

How to Avoid Child Nightwakings Effectively



Recently, studies have shown that 15 to 20 percent of one to three year-olds tend to have nightwakings. Stephanie Zandieh, M.D., Director, Pediatric Sleep Disorders and Apnea Center of The Valley Hospital, explained that, “Improper sleep associations are the major cause of recurring nightwakings. [Sleep](#) associations are known as the conditions that are usually present at the time of sleep onset and in the existence of which the infant or child has learned to fall asleep. These same conditions are then needed in order for the infant or child to fall back to sleep following periodic regular nighttime arousals.”

[Sleep](#) associations can be appropriate like thumb sucking or problematic such as rocking, nursing, or parental presence. “Problematic sleep associations are those that need parental involvement and thus cannot be reinstated independently by the child upon awakening during the night,” mentions Dr. Zandieh.

Here are some useful tips to make your child sleep soundly through the night:

1. Develop a proper [sleep](#) schedule with an early bedtime. Ironically, the more tired your child is, the more times he or she will awaken during the night. Hence, be sure that your child goes on to take naps during the day and set an early bedtime schedule.
2. Establish a security object or love object for your child. A transitional object, like a stuffed toy or doll or blanket, allows a child to feel safe and secure when you are not present. Make your child become attached to this security object by adding it as a part of the bedtime routine. Additionally, try to keep this object whenever you are cuddling or comforting your child.
3. Bedtime routine: Build a consistent bedtime routine that has calm and enjoyable activities, including a bath and a bedtime story.
4. Constant bedroom environment: Make sure that your child’s bedroom environment is the same and is consistent at bedtime as it is throughout the nighttime, especially in terms of lighting.

5. Put your child to bed awake: Following the bedtime routine, put your child into his or her bed awake and leave the room. Keep in mind that the key to having your children sleep through the night is to make them learn to fall asleep on their own, so they can put themselves back to [sleep](#) when they naturally awaken during the night.
6. Checking method: If you noticed your child crying or yelling, check on her. You can wait for as long or as short a time according to your wish. The checking time varies with the children, for some kids, frequent checking is required; for others, infrequent checking works best. Keep on returning to check on your child as long as she is crying or upset. The visits should be short (one minute) and non-stimulating. Calmly explain to your child that it's time to go to sleep. The intention of returning to the room is to assure that your child that you are still present and to assure yourself that your child is okay.
7. Respond to your child during the night; it is good to respond to your child as you usually do throughout the night, in the beginning. If your child keeps on awakening during the night for several weeks, then follow the same routine during the night.
8. A more gradual approach: Some parents think that not being present when their child fall asleep feels more as the first step for them and their child. A better gradual approach is to train your child to fall asleep on their own, but with your presence in the room. This approach may take longer the other way, but it can feel easier for some families. The first step is to put your child into her bed awake and sit on a chair adjacent to it. Once she could fall asleep without any nightwakings this way, sit at a distance every 3 to 4 nights until you are in the hallway and not in sight.
9. Be consistent and don't give up. The first few nights are expected to be very challenging, and usually the second or third night is much worse than the first night. But, you will begin to see improvement within a few nights to a week.