

Supporting Healthy Nap Time Routines

Sleep is important to children's development. Consistent and healthy sleep patterns are linked to memory acquisition, language development, and cognitive skills.

How Many Naps Do They Need?

Child's Age	Number of Naps	Total Amount of Daytime Sleep
Birth-6 months	3-4	5+ hours
6-12 months	2-3	4-5 hours
1 year old	1-2	3-4 hours
2 years old	1	2-3 hours
3 years old	1	1-2 hours
4-5 years old	1	1 hour

Daytime sleep patterns shift as children grow, and individual needs can vary. Sleep needs and routines can also be affected by multiple factors in a child's life, such as:

- Developmental phases
- Trauma, stress, or illness
- Changing or inconsistent routines at home
- A child who is overstimulated or overtired.
- A child who is unsure about a new environment.

Empowering and Respecting Children

- Find ways to give children power and autonomy throughout their day and around the time leading up to their nap. This will decrease their need to test limits around naps.
- Talk with children about quiet time expectations. Remind them they don't have to sleep, but they do need to rest quietly to allow others to sleep.
- Ask children to help lay out nap cots/mats and bedding.
- Discuss solutions to nap issues with individual children and the group.
- Create and read social stories about the group's nap time and other routines.
- Increase active play in children's daily routine.
- A child who takes a shorter nap than others in the group might be able to help you with small jobs before or after they rest.
- Consider creating a quiet activity space in the classroom for early risers, or offer "quiet activity" boxes with a special selection of puzzles, manipulatives, art supplies, or other safe options. Be mindful of choking hazards, and always safely supervise children who are working with materials.

Calming Routine

As the adult caring for young children in a group setting, you play an important role as you create a calming routine for nap or rest time. Steps you can take to support a calming routine in your program could include:

- Ask all adults to use calm and quiet voices.
- Read favorite books aloud (such as *The Napping House*; *But First We Nap*; and *No More Naps*).
- Play relaxing audio storybooks.
- Dim lights to a level that is sufficient to see children's faces and movements.
- Play relaxing nap time music at a volume that allows you to hear children.
- Notice the group's shifting needs. Consider adjusting nap time throughout the year. Daytime-Saving Time can affect children's sleeping schedule, and you may consider shifting nap time to later in the day during different seasons and as children grow.

What About You? (Self-Care)

Nap time is often the time in the day that caregivers get a chance to attend to the tasks they can't get to when children are awake. Whether you grab something to eat, call a parent back, or just have a quiet moment to yourself, you are likely counting on this time. It's important to remember that your best-laid plans may have to shift.

- Be aware of your stress levels. As we all know, you must take care of yourself before you can care for others.
- Avoid power struggles with children. When you feel emotions rising, take a breath and reconsider your approach.
- Have a plan, but stay flexible for individual needs.

Partnering with Parents

Many parents struggle with their young child's sleep routines at some point in their development. You may encounter a parent or guardian who asks you to limit or even eliminate their child's nap. Communication and shared understanding is important in this situation, as it is unlikely that you can completely eliminate their child's need for a quiet rest period; their child likely needs at least some rest or down time during the day.

- Ask parents to share their concerns with you. Listen carefully, and acknowledge their point of view, even if you may not completely agree. While all children in your program may lay down for a rest, you may be able to wake a child after a period of time in an effort to support the family's needs. Develop a plan that works to best for everyone. This plan may change over time.
- Ask parents to communicate their child's home sleep routines at the time of enrollment and as their child matures. This understanding can help to support a strong partnership that will help the child succeed in your program.
- Check in with parents about any changes in their child's routines, and find a way to share details about their child's routine at child care. This can be done verbally at drop off, written on a daily sheet, or through a child care management or communication app.

Meet children where they are and remember that you have the power to create the peaceful sleep environment you want. It will take time and patience. If a child's behavior at nap time is disruptive, make sure you have a clear idea of your expectations and develop a plan to gradually achieve your goal. Don't expect immediate changes.

Resources

17 Nap Time Tips, from Paper Pinecone: <https://www.paperpinecone.com/blog/17-nap-time-tips-daycare-centers>

"I Want my Mommy": Guiding Children at Nap Time:
https://www.childcarequarterly.com/pdf/fall11_naptime.pdf

Nap Time is for Letting Go, from NAEYC:
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/dec2016/nap-time-letting-go>

The Culture of Sleep and Child Care, from Head Start:
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/news-you-can-use-culture-sleep-child-care>

Nap Time Know-How: A Parent's Guide, from Web MD:
<https://www.webmd.com/parenting/kids-naps>