

# nighty night, everyone!

A solid stretch of sleep isn't just a dream. Check out our expert and real-life solutions for what's keeping your family up.

by LAUREN SMITH BRODY

**IT'S BEEN** months, maybe years, since your little one started sleeping through the night. And yet, there you are, wide awake at 2:47 A.M., because she wants water, is scared, or has some need she can't quite explain.

Your priority is clear: Especially since it's back-to-school season, you need your family to sleep. You also have to quit thinking about that awful thing Uncle Howie said to you back when you were first pregnant, about how you wouldn't get a good night's rest for the next 18 years.

He was wrong.

Of course there will be occasional sleep setbacks, but you can easily

achieve a 95 percent success rate (and problem-solve your way through the rest of the time).

There's just one rule: Total sleep is what counts. Two-year-olds who sleep less than 11 hours per night are five times as likely to have social or emotional problems compared to those who sleep for 13 to 14 hours, according to a study published in *Infant Behavior and Development*.

How do you know what bedtime is right for your kid? Forget age guidelines. Look for these clues: Is he cranky during the day, and do you have to wake him in the morning? If you answered yes to either, he needs

an earlier bedtime—which starts with a regular routine. “Studies show having a routine improves sleep quality,” says *Parents* advisor Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., associate director of the Sleep Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. “Plus, parents are most fully present with their child right before bed. It's the whole package in 30 minutes.”

The fixes, lists, and products that follow will make your routine easier—and help you troubleshoot nighttime problems. Copy or adapt them to suit your needs, and you'll all get the sleep you deserve. Hear that, Uncle Howie?





Sure, it's safe (for bigger kids), but is this really your idea of a restful night?



## ➔ Questions from the trenches

### \* Can I teach my toddler to sleep late on weekends?

Good luck—young kids don't know (and don't care) that Saturdays are for catching up on shut-eye. "I'd be more inclined to show your toddler how to entertain himself," says Amanda Tarullo, Ph.D., director of the Brain and Early Experiences Lab at Boston University. By age 3, you can use a light-up alarm clock to signal when he's allowed to wake you up. Then give him safe toys to keep him occupied until then. "Once he's old enough to play in his room by himself, a little age-appropriate screen time is fine too," says Dr. Tarullo.

### \* I know you should never wake a sleeping child, but what if I actually need to?

It's the oldest sleep rule of all, and for good reason. Still, you shouldn't feel guilty about cutting your child's sleep short to, say, make a crack-of-dawn flight, says Dr. Tarullo. You can minimize the impact by planning ahead. "Put her to bed early and let her sleep in her clothes," says Dr. Tarullo. "Or, if you're arriving home after bedtime, put her pajamas on ahead of time."



### \* So...um...can I drug my kid?

"Not unless your child's doctor advises it," says Dr. Mindell. Some parents use Benadryl to help their child nod off on long rides. While it's safe for kids over 2, try it at home first, because some kids actually become hyper, says Dr. Mindell.

### \* Should we just cosleep?

Avoid bedsharing until your child is at least 12 months old, when the risk of SIDS, accidental suffocation, and strangulation in bed are lower, advises the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). After that, it's up to you. Cosleeping is the norm in many cultures. If you want to join them, follow these rules: **1.** Both you and your child must get enough sleep. **2.** Use a bed rail to prevent falls. **3.** Everyone has to be on board. If one parent wants to do it and the other objects, there will be conflicts, says Dr. Mindell.

## ➔ The ages and stages of bad dreams

In general, don't turn on the light or let your child sleep in your room. Both confirm the notion that being alone in the dark is scary. "You need to walk a fine line between being reassuring and reinforcing the fear," says Dr. Mindell.

● **Ages 2 to 4** Take advantage of your child's magical thinking. "A dream catcher is a great tool to reduce her nerves about nightmares," says Dr. Mindell. You can also give her a stuffed animal and ask if she'll protect it—or convince her that the comfort object will keep her safe.

● **Ages 4 to 6** Create a simple "reset button" your child can rely on, like flipping over his pillow. Reduce his anxiety during the day by having him draw a picture that represents his bad dream and then crumple it up and throw it away.

● **Ages 6 and up** Encourage your kid to think about something happy or fun that's happened to help her mind let go of the bad dream. Also have her think of a new ending for her nightmare that's silly or empowering (the monster cries when your child takes away his blanket).

## ➔ Now you're wide awake—here's what to do

You've finally gotten your kid safely back to dreamland, but you can't seem to join her. Don't self-medicate such "secondary insomnia," say experts—especially if you have to be up and functional in a few hours. Try these remedies instead.

### Buy a darkroom light.

You know not to use your phone or computer in the middle of the night, right? It suppresses your production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin. Still, when you get up to check on your kids, even a hallway night-light can throw your system into awake mode, says Hawley Montgomery-Downs, Ph.D., director of the Sleep Research Laboratory at West Virginia University, in Morgantown. Her unconventional suggestion: Get a red light (also known as a "safe light") like the kind used in old photography darkrooms. This won't affect your body's melatonin level, so you can get back to sleep more easily. You can find one online.

### Turn off your inner voice.

Worrying about the fact that you're awake creates a vicious cycle. "Cover your clock so you're not staring at the numbers," says Dr. Mindell. Also, stop trying so hard. "Tell yourself that just lying there and resting is good enough. Often, that will calm you down and make it easier to fall asleep."

### Get crunchy.

Repeat a soothing mantra ("I am very sleepy") to help get you into a relaxed state, or try lavender pillow spray or a few drops of chamomile oil in a diffuser; both are popular remedies for insomnia.

## → Can this night be saved?

Parents who can negotiate their way out of traffic tickets or arguments with the MILs say they feel powerless against a little voice begging at bedtime or in the middle of the night. We asked experts to troubleshoot these real-life scenarios.

### "She won't let us leave her room."

The subject: **Lulu, age 3**

She talks a mile a minute, likes broccoli with salty butter, wears a Red Sox hat everywhere, and is

generally an awesome kid—except at nighttime, when Lulu's poor parents are reduced to staying in her room, helpless, until she falls asleep. To be fair, it's gotten better(ish). They used to lie down with her; now they sit on the floor and read until she's asleep. Still, it can take hours because she wakes up when they try to tiptoe out.

**Help for the weary** It's worth ruling out external factors, like a tummy ache or underlying anxiety, points out Wendy Moyal, M.D., a child psychiatrist at the Child Mind Institute, in New York City. Then

she'd want to know if Lulu still naps. "If she does, and it takes hours to get her to sleep at night, I'd phase naps out," Dr. Moyal suggests. "Every few days, add a short daytime snooze for catch-up."

If that doesn't do the trick, it's time for a behavioral intervention. Lulu's parents can begin weaning her need for their presence by moving closer to the door each night and not looking at their phone while they're waiting (the light can interfere with sleep). "Give her something of yours, like a sweater or an undershirt, to have in the room as a transitional object," says Dr. Moyal. They should leave while Lulu's still awake and tell her what they'll be doing—cleaning up, washing the dishes—so she doesn't feel like she's missing out. On the first night, they should let her know

they'll be back to check on her (and do so right away). Then extend that to every five minutes and, once that works, every ten minutes. They should keep going until they only check on her once. The process often takes several weeks to complete.

### "He always ends up in our bed."

The subject: **Charlie, age 5**

Charlie is an athletic, outgoing kid who loves school. He slept great as a baby, breezed through

toddlerhood, and then turned 4. For more than a year, he has crawled into his parents' bed around 3 A.M. without fail. Charlie has no real complaint. He doesn't need to use the bathroom and hasn't had a nightmare. He simply grabs his blanket and shows up. His mom often doesn't notice until the morning, but his dad usually winds up kicked out of bed. While his parents have tried sending Charlie back to his room and talking about it the next day, they're fed up.

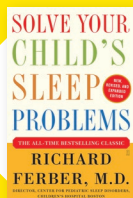
**Help for the weary** Key question: What's going on at Charlie's bedtime? Dr. Mindell suspects that his parents lie down with him until he falls asleep. "When a child has help falling asleep at bedtime, he'll need that same help going back to sleep in the middle of the night," she says. If so, they need to stop.

Otherwise, it's merely a bad habit. To help him kick it, they need to set this ground rule: He must sleep in his bed all night, and they'll return him to his own bed every single time he comes in. To make sure Mom wakes up when he comes in, they should put a bell on their bedroom door. Dr. Mindell also suggests using a sticker chart with a fun incentive for cooperating (such as a family outing to the zoo). If Charlie's parents stay firm, he should stop bed-hopping within two weeks.





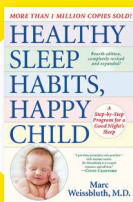
## ➔ The essential deets on sleep training



**Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems, by Richard Ferber, M.D.** (first published in 1985) The author is so well-known that he's earned his own verb ("Ferberizing"). His most celebrated method advocates teaching a baby to self-soothe by leaving him in bed for increasingly longer stretches, with occasional check-ins to reassure him.



**The No-Cry Sleep Solution, by Elizabeth Pantley** (first published in 2002) This mom of four helps you create your own customized plan. First you identify sleep culprits (such as being overtired or overstimulated), and then you give your baby sensory cues (scented lotion and a pitch-black room) that it's time for slumber.



**Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, by Marc Weissbluth, M.D.** (first published in 1987) His fastest method has you put your baby down early—shortening daytime naps if necessary—and let her cry herself to sleep without going in to comfort her (unless there's an emergency).

Kids share a room? You might need to whisper the bedtime story.



## ➔ Seussical sleep solutions

We asked parents to share their smart ideas for adapting to challenging circumstances. Would they, could they, save the day? With apologies to Dr. Seuss, try them and they may, we say!

**...in a distant place** "When changing time zones, we'll split the difference for the first couple of days to help our kids adjust. So for a two-hour shift, we'll do it one hour at a time. I also go to great lengths to keep our bedtime routine the same as at home." —Heather Ladov; Oakland, CA

**...when you're far from home base** "If I'm traveling for work, I keep in touch with my children through FaceTime right before they go to bed. They tell me about their day, then I say good night to them individually. I see them, and they see me. This makes us all feel more connected." —Megan Zavieh; Alpharetta, GA

**...at Grandma's for the night** "To help my girls feel at home at my parents' house, we keep a bag there with duplicates of their loveys and favorite books. We also let them pick out the bedding. That way they feel like the guest room is their room." —Liz O'Flanagan Walder; Philadelphia

**...when big bro needs a light** "My older son likes having a light on so he can read before bed, which sometimes bothers my 3-year-old, who shares the bedroom. So I make him a 'fortress of darkness' by propping pillows all around him to block out the light. He thinks it's cool." —Allison Brown; Ridgewood, NJ

**...how 'bout on a plane?** "Bring a pillow and a blanket along with you. It's worth carrying the extra stuff. No one sleeps well on a pillow that doesn't feel or smell like home." —Sarah Serafin; Chagrin Falls, OH

**...or in a storm with torrential rain?** This one's from me, Lauren, your friendly writer! When I saw the sky get that ominous look, I acted really excited. I explained the science of a storm to my older son and talked about how cozy it is to be snug in your bed when it's thundering outside. He passed that message along to his little brother. It's been all good since.

REAL-LIFE READ

# our cradle: it's ugly, but it rocks!

I couldn't handle any more sleepless nights with our newborn. So I traded in our classic bassinet for one that did the work for me. by **MATTHEW DICKS**



The author and his rocking daughter, Clara.

**I WAS TOTALLY** invested in nesting before the birth of our first child. We converted a poorly decorated guest room into a charming nursery in shades of yellow, brown, and red. We got a simple wooden crib with a curved rail. My wife, Elysha, hand-sewed a mobile of owls to hang over it. We bought a large cushioned chair in which she'd spend hundreds of hours nursing. We picked up a lovely little lamp, a bookshelf, and striped curtains. A friend offered us her cradle—white, classic, pristine—for the early months. We put it in our bedroom. We were ready.

Then our daughter, Clara, was born, infinitely more beautiful than

the space we had prepared for her. After five days in the hospital, she and my wife finally came home. I was thrilled and a little confused. We walked through the front door, removed our coats, and stood in the dining room staring at each other.

"So I guess we do what we normally do?" I asked. "Just with this little person?"

So we did. We went back to writing, reading, cooking, and *Battlestar Galactica* episodes in between feedings. That first night, after Elysha nursed Clara, I swaddled her and placed her in the cradle beside our bed. She was so quiet. This parenting thing was easy.

Clara remained silent for a minute. Then she began to whimper. I reached out from beneath the blankets, grabbed hold of the cradle, and began to rock it back and forth. Clara settled down. A moment later she was asleep.

I pulled my arm back under the covers and began to drift off. Three minutes later, Clara started to whimper again. I reached out, rocked her back to sleep, and closed my eyes again.

A moment later came more whimpering. I ignored it, hoping Clara would fall back asleep on her own. Her whimper became a cry. Elysha rolled over. I couldn't see her in the dark, but I felt her glare. I knew what she was thinking: Rock the damn baby, Matthew.

So I did. Five hours in bed and about nine minutes of sleep later, I was finished. There had to be a better way, a machine to do this rocking for me.

Later that day, I searched online for a self-rocking cradle. As far as I could tell, there was only one model on the market at the time. Just press a button and it would rock. Brilliant idea. Then I saw the photo. The cradle was ugly. Cumbersome. Egg-shaped. Green and brown. With an oddly shaped canopy. It looked like it was designed by someone who hated pretty things. I worried that placing our perfect infant in this hideous contraption might constitute a hate crime.

After one more night of sleepless, manual rocking, we purchased the cradle. It looked worse than we had thought. Enormous. Excessive. Misshapen. The mattress was thin, hard, and rough, not meant for a baby.

That night, I swaddled Clara and placed her in the monstrosity beside our bed. I pressed the button. It began to rock back and forth. I fell asleep. I remained asleep until her next feeding. It was a miracle.

One year later, my friend Erica gave birth to her first child. I offered her the monstrosity. She saw the photo and rejected it out of hand. I understood. I waited. Three days later, she begged for the self-rocking cradle with the desperate tremor of a heroin addict trying to score her next fix.

When it comes to a good night's sleep, function beats form every time.

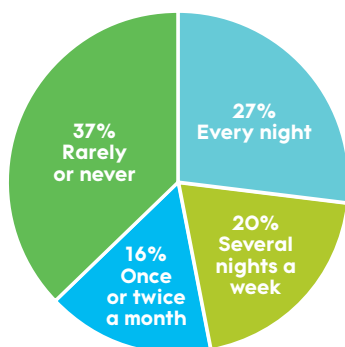




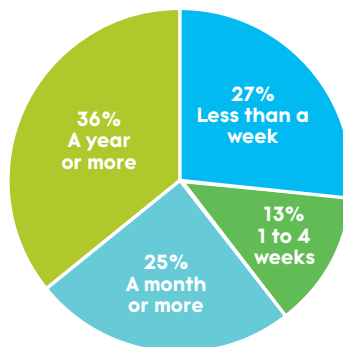
## What you said about sleep

We polled *Parents* readers to see what's happening in your home at nighttime.

**How often does your child wake you up during the night?**



**How long has it been since you felt truly rested?**



## ➔ Should your infant sleep in your room?

The AAP recommends that infants sleep in a crib or bassinet in their parents' room for at least six months (ideally a full year) to help reduce the risk of SIDS, but a new study in *Pediatrics* suggests this may not be the safest plan. Parents who room-shared with their baby at 4 months and at 9 months were four times more likely to bring their baby into bed overnight than those whose infants were sleeping independently. "Room-sharing helps keep your baby safe and makes it easier to breastfeed and to bond," says Fern R. Hauck, M.D., a member of the AAP Task Force on SIDS. Just make sure he doesn't wind up in your bed.

## ➔ 3 sensory helpers

### ● SMELL: Johnson's Bedtime Baby Bath and Baby Lotion

The calming aroma is designed to soothe your baby—first in the bathtub and then when you massage him gently before bed. \$8 each; [target.com](http://target.com)



● SIGHT: The Very Hungry Caterpillar Travel Soother and Projector Pack this adorable night-light, which projects stars and butterflies in three colors, to ensure any wall and ceiling looks like home. \$18; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)



### ● SOUND: Cloud B Sweet Dreamz on the Go

This white-noise machine clips to strollers and car seats. The eight settings include a rhythmic "Shhh," a heartbeat, nature sounds, and lullabies. \$17; [cloudb.com](http://cloudb.com)

