

Your Two and a Half to Five Year Old Child and Sleep

What to Expect

Between **ages two and three**, average sleep needs to drop to about ten and a half hours a night plus an hour-and-a-half afternoon nap. **Four year olds** need eleven and a half hour at night, and most no longer nap daily, although they do need about forty-five minutes of quiet time each afternoon and possibly an occasional nap. **Five year olds** sleep about eleven hours a night, and afternoon quiet time is still beneficial.

Typical Schedule for Two and a Half to Five Year Old

Preschoolers still need a lot of sleep, but they are immensely clever at devising reasons not to get it. They stall and evade with amazing ingenuity, which for parents can be frustrating, or comical, or both. As parents, we need to inject some discipline into bedtime but still keep it warm and cozy. We need to help them with those bouts of the scaries that can make bedtime difficult even when they aren't turning stalling into a competitive sport. As they begin to cut back and eventually outgrow their naps, we have to keep tinkering with their sleep and wake schedules and introduce afternoon quiet time in order to avoid meltdowns before dinner.

Once your child is in preschool, his schedule will be shaped largely by the hours he's there, when the class has nap time, and other outside factors. That said, there are some things you can (and should) control:

- Generally, you want him to **wake up between 6:00 and 7:30 a.m.**
- Around age 4, most children stop napping. When your preschooler hits this milestone, make sure he still has some **quiet time in the later afternoon** (looking at books in his room, for example), and move his bedtime up by about an hour – i.e., if he had been getting to bed at 8:30 p.m., now he should be in bed by 7:30 p.m.
- By age 5, he can probably stay up a little later- until 8:00 p.m. – and he should sleep until around 7:00 a.m. In other words, he should get **11 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night**; adjust your child's exact bed- and wake-up times to coincide with your family schedule and his school-start time.

Also, be aware that preschoolers are very good at hiding when they're sleepy, which can make it tough to get their bedtime just right. Continue to **watch for sleep cues like yawning, eye-rubbin, thumb-sucking, or crankiness**. If your tot gets that cortisol-fueled second wind (meaning you missed his sleep window), start getting him to bed a half-hour or so earlier from now on. Similarly, if he starts nodding off during his bedtime routine or falls asleep the very second you turn out the lights, you're probably putting him to bed too late. Move bedtime earlier by 15 to 30 minutes.