

Response Based Sleep & Settling for TODDLERS 1-3 years

Toddlers, ahh toddlers ... they are fun, full of energy, and don't want to miss any fun, they love to spend every waking minute with you so they don't miss anything! To have a toddler is to know the joy, energy and delight a little person can bring; what fun and how willfull they can also be, as they evolve from babyhood to childhood.

Toddlers are learning how to interact and give and take in the world. It can be exciting and often confusing as their simple understanding seems to not always align with what needs to happen. Some things are negotiable, such as which shoes or which book. These choices give your toddler a sense of their much desired control of themselves and their environment, however some things are not so negotiable, both safety and the need for sleep.

To help your toddler adjust to separation at sleep time, allow them some choices during wakeful times, so they have some sense of control, and therefore they don't feel the need to control so much at sleep time. Toddlers seek attention; good or bad. If they don't get positive attention, any attention will do, so you can help by commenting on their positive behaviours and achievements and building on those, rather than focusing on the negative.

Try this: avoid saying "NO," to your toddler for a day, and use positive comments instead ... and now try it for several days in a row. Your toddler may show dramatic behavioural changes, but all they are doing is responding to the care they receive.

To help toddlers feel good about going to their cot or bed;

- if your toddler struggles to settle to sleep, do some day time role playing by encouraging your toddler to settle their favourite toy to bed
- talk about bedtime expectations before bed, then there is no need for lengthy discussions and negotiating when everyone is getting tired
- quiet time does not involve flickering, bright lights or screens; so no computers, TVs, iPads etc., for at least half an hour before bed time. Quiet time is critical to help energetic toddlers to calm down
- overtired toddlers can have enormous difficulty drifting to sleep, so get them to bed when you see their early tired signs
- preparation for bed time is important; let your toddler know when it is "five minutes before bed time," then two minutes, and ask what is the last thing they would like to do, or who are they taking to bed. Toddlers can delay going to bed with negotiation and 'just one more ...,' so guide them to the selection of maybe one toy to cuddle to sleep, or the last song before sleep. Gentle kind guidance is the key
- reassure your toddler that you will stay a while as they settle. When they are calm, find a reason to leave the room AND RETURN. Your toddler will begin to trust brief separations if you are true to your word. This trust will help them develop the skill to drift to sleep while they wait for you.

Most of all, remember; toddlers are not being naughty when they are struggling to settle for sleep, they often need support and kindness to help them find their way. Exchange punishment for kindness and comfort so they feel safe and secure to be able to sleep.

Toddlers continue to need a physically safe environment as well, so be alert to their developmental changes and adjust the environment accordingly to keep them physically safe.

At [Safe Sleep Space](http://www.safesleepspace.com) we offer a range of services; phone consultations, home visits and day stay programs. We also have resources; ROCKABUB app, 0-12 months sleep DVD, toddler sleep DVD and the Safe Sleep Space book & ebook, none of which involve controlled crying. For more information go to; www.safesleepspace.com.au or call us on 1300 775 337