

until morning light



Gentle sleep coach Lucy Wolfe with her children Jesse, aged eight; Ellen, aged six; Eden, aged four and Harry Burke, nine months. Picture: Eddie O'Hare

NINE STEPS TO A SOOTHING BEDTIME ROUTINE

1. Dim the lights an hour before bedtime to get the body ready for sleep.
2. Give your child a soothing bath and brush their teeth.
3. Now, you can give your child a gentle massage if you like before putting on their pyjamas.
4. If your child is at toddler age, they can pick out their own pyjamas, as this keeps them involved.
5. Keep bedtime simple and quiet without any playing or messing that would wake your child up.
6. Do a quiet bonding activity like reading or singing a soft song, and this will help your child to switch from being alert to sleepy.
7. Try to create your own unique bedtime routine that you can use for years to come, like reading out loud, praying, singing, or sharing stories from your day.
8. Promise to check on your child before you go to bed yourself and when you check on them tell them how cosy and peaceful they look, as they will be comforted by the knowledge that you have seen your promise through and they feel safe, secure and watched over.
9. Time for lights out. If your child protests, use a clock or timer so that you can say "the clock says 8pm, so that means lights out." This routine will mean that your child will go to sleep feeling secure, settled down and they will sleep peacefully.

Common sleeping problems for children

HAVING a sleep crutch is a problem for many children because they will not go to sleep without their bottle, or without holding their mother's hand. The ideals of the Gentle Sleep Coach school of thought eliminate these negative sleep associations out of the child's bedtime routine.

● When the child wakes up and

their bottle isn't there, their sleep circumstances have changed and they struggle to get back to sleep, so they start to cry and the only thing that will get them back to sleep is the return of the bottle.

● Many parents who work during the day keep their children up late so that they can spend time with them. By doing this, you're miss-

ing out on the natural sleep window when the child is naturally tired at around 7pm — ideally the child should be asleep by then.

● Drinking milk throughout the night is also very unhealthy, as some children are drinking their body weight in milk during the night and then they have no appetite during the day, their routine is

upset and they get cranky — so the night feeding perpetuates into a problem that disrupts the child's entire routine.

● Children taking vitamins or having ice-cream before bed is a big problem, as they are taking in sugar and hyping up their bodies just as they should be switching off and getting ready to sleep.

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