

## Even Superheroes Go to Bed



**“Mommy,” said four-year-old Brian, running past with a dish towel pinned to his shoulders, “Superheroes like me don’t get tired. You can go to bed, but I’m going to keep on playing.”**  
 Brian’s mother yawned and shook her head at him.  
 “Maybe superheroes don’t need sleep, but kids do.”

**And it’s true. Kids need quite a bit of sleep.** Getting enough sleep recharges a child’s mind and body. It helps him or her concentrate in school and fight off illness. Parents know, too, that a rested child is easier to get along with.  
**But how much sleep is “enough?”** Often it helps to look at some of the figures for children the same age as yours. As your child’s parent, however, you are the best one to decide if your child does better with more sleep or with less than the following averages. Every child is unique.

- **Doctors report that between the ages of one and three many children sleep twelve hours at night and take a nap every day.**
- **Starting at around age four or five the figures drop to eleven hours of sleep out of twenty-four.**
- **This need for eleven hours of sleep continues into the early elementary school years.**

**Even when you have a pretty good idea of how much sleep your child needs, making sure he or she gets it can be another matter altogether.**

Perhaps like Brian’s mother, you’ve decided your child needs to be asleep by 8:00. And perhaps, like Brian, your child wants to keep right on playing. Parents who have been through this advise that you shouldn’t take such behavior personally. And it’s good advice. It’s not uncommon for young children to fight the whole idea of going to bed because they aren’t able, just yet to recognize how tired they really are. And often they lack the ability to calm themselves down for sleep. They need your help in this.

While you can’t make your child sleep, there is much you can do to help sleep come more easily. Here are some suggestions that have worked for other parents:

1. **Have a regular bedtime.** You can count on habit to help your child feel sleepy. In setting a bedtime, take a look at how long your son or daughter sleeps in the afternoon. A preschooler who takes a two-hour nap can use a later bedtime than one who has only a brief quiet time after lunch.
2. **Avoid putting your child in his or her bed as a punishment for misbehavior during the day.** That only makes bed seem like a place to avoid at all costs.
3. **Establish a bedtime routine and repeat it each night.** Children thrive on predictability. Brian brushes his teeth, takes one last “make sure” trip to the bathroom, listens to a story and gets a goodnight kiss. He likes to do these things in the same unhurried order every night because knowing what to expect helps him feel safe and relaxed.

His mother lets him choose what story to read and exactly how he wants his blankets tucked in so that he feels like he has some “say” over going to bed even though he can’t choose the time. (She also starts the whole routine well ahead of the time she hopes he will fall asleep.)

4. **Tell your child what you’ll be doing after he or she is in bed.** Some children hate to miss out on anything and knowing ahead of time that those interesting noises in the kitchen are just you packing tomorrow’s lunches may ease the desire to get up and check.
5. **For a child who repeatedly gets up out of bed and joins you, try this. When you say goodnight, promise that you will be back in a while to check on him or her.** Be sure to come back before your child is likely to get up. Don’t stay to visit. Just put in a quiet and reassuring appearance and be on your way again.
6. **Put a small light near your child’s bed so that he or she can look at books or play with a few quiet toys while waiting to fall asleep.** Use these ideas, and others that you may think of, to help your child unwind enough to feel drowsy. Even if he is a superhero!