

TIPS — Sleep Is Crucial for Young Children

Many Americans are suffering from a shortage of sleep, and young children are no exception. A site associated with the National Sleep Foundation, sleepforkids.org, reveals that most 3- to 5-year-olds are averaging 10.4 hours of sleep a night, even though pediatricians recommend 11-13 hours for that age group. This means that nap time is a very important part of the preschool day.



Establishing a flexible daily schedule is important for every child care program. Children feel secure knowing what will happen next. Some samples of typical schedules are in *Essentials for Child Development Associates Working with Young Children*, pp. 148-149.

Your daily schedule should include outdoor play and indoor activities, as well as quiet times for children to rest. Just as children need air to breathe and food to eat, rest is essential for their development. Children who do not get enough sleep may become cranky and tired as the day progresses.

When you plan a daily nap time, not every child will sleep, but every child benefits from rest. You will begin to develop a natural rhythm for the day, including outdoor and indoor play, individual play and group time, music, art, reading, snack, lunch, and nap time.

Planning your nap time is as important as planning the curriculum. Having a calming transition to nap time, such a particular song or rhyme, will notify the children to begin to calm down. Every child should have his or her own space to rest, someplace fairly quiet and without bright lights. Children who cannot sleep should have quiet activities they can do.

Handouts for teachers and parents about children's typical need for sleep are at <http://www.sleepforkids.org/html/tp.html>.