



Toddler Sleep Training: Sleep Training in a Bed

It's always best to keep your toddler in a bed for as long as possible (see module Transitioning to a Big Bed). However, when you have a toddler jumping out of the crib and nothing you do can keep him inside, it leaves you no choice but to transition to a bed.

If you are sleep training your toddler or preschooler in a bed, please take into account this very important advice:

- 1) The basic Shuffle, which is usually my preferred approach with older toddlers and preschoolers, is done in the same way as it's done in the crib with the same Shuffle positions. Sit in a chair next to your child's bed and keep moving away. If she's sleeping on a low toddler bed or mattress on the floor, sit on the floor instead.
- 2) Think of your child's entire room as his crib or bed. Your toddler is allowed to fall asleep anywhere in his room because most toddlers are not mature enough to understand rules such as "you must stay in your bed until the morning" so expecting a toddler to do so on a regular basis is often not realistic. If she falls asleep on the floor, that's fine! Consider that a success—this is why I also advise to baby proof the room and put up a gate by the door.
- 3) If your child is getting distracted with the toys in her room and it's delaying the onset of sleep, move all the toys into a toy box out of reach.

4) If your child wakes up thirsty, or claims to be thirsty, put a sippy cup next to the bed - problem solved!

5) You can likely expect more protesting since the bed offers way more freedom than the crib. Remain patient and consistent here. I've seen 3 year olds throw 90-minute tantrums in the middle of the night when they no longer get to go into their parents' bed or get their midnight snack. Be prepared for a bit of a battle! Try to remain in the chair for as much as possible and keep the talking to a minimum so that you don't get sucked into a sleep-postponing conversation. So you can say "go to sleep sweetie" or "shhh" but avoid anything more than that.

6) When your child wakes up at night, always always go straight back to the chair if you're doing the Shuffle—do NOT go to her bed to tuck your child back in, even for 5 seconds, as that 5 second interaction rewards the wakeup and possibly encourages her to wake up AGAIN, just to get tucked back in again.

7) Just like with a child in the crib, feel free to go to him and pat him or pick him up if he gets really hysterical, but make sure the hug is brief and that he doesn't fall asleep in your arms.

8) If your child continuously gets out of bed and tries to sit on your lap, give him a hug and then return him to his bed. Don't talk, don't reason, don't explain—just tuck him back in. If you are sitting in the room and he continuously gets out of bed and refuses to listen, you can threaten to leave the room and sit on the other side of the gate unless he gets back in bed. Follow through on the threat and sit there until he agrees to listen, and as soon as he gets back in bed, come back into the room and sit on the chair again. If you're sitting by the doorway or in the hallway and he's refusing to listen, you can also offer to tuck him in if he gets into bed—but make sure the tuck in is VERY brief, no extra hugs or kisses as those could fuel further wakeups and protesting. Just put the blanket over him and return back to the chair. And when you're near the end of the process and you're

sitting in the hallway but outside of his view, if your monkey is still continuously popping out of bed to make sure you're still in the hallway, I'd threaten to leave the hallway if he doesn't stay in his bed.

9) Don't give into your toddler's tactics to prolong falling asleep. I've seen kids throw their stuffed animals on the floor and even over the gate in frustration! Don't return the objects that got thrown over the gate until he gets back in bed. I've seen kids only lie in bed halfway with their feet on the ground—it's fine, just ignore it. I've seen kids spend time playing in their room once the lights are out—that's fine too. Just ignore it.

10) Have a plan in place for nighttime bathroom challenges. If your toddler is nighttime potty trained, but is waking throughout the night to go to the bathroom, either put her back into nighttime diapers OR put a potty in her room so that she can go pee by herself and go back to sleep.