



SleepSmart

Sleep and Rest Recommendations for Preschoolers (3–5 years)

To promote healthy growth and development, preschool children should receive support from parents, educators and caregivers that allows for a daily balance of physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep. Developing healthy sleep hygiene in the early years is important and includes; having a calming sleep-time routine, avoiding screen time before sleep and most importantly, consideration of each individual child's sleep and rest requirements.

E4Kids Research Program

In 2010-2011 the sleep studies research group at QUT, observing the quality of ECEC in Australia, identified sleep practice as an issue of concern and instigated the formation of the Sleep in Early Childhood Research Group (SECRG) bringing together expertise in sleep science, developmental science and early education policy and practice. The findings raised concerns about the effect of mandated sleep on children's learning, health and wellbeing.

A study of nearly 170 children aged between 4 and 6 found that attending a childcare centre that enforced mandatory nap times of longer than an hour was linked to children getting an average of 24 minutes less sleep each night.

Another study measuring cortisol levels (stress hormone) of sleepers and non-sleepers who attended ECEC services, found that non-sleepers

experiencing mandated sleep periods had higher levels of cortisol at night-time.

“Insufficient night-time sleep in young children significantly increases the risk of poor health and developmental outcomes, including obesity and behavioural problems.”

When the research team checked back with the children after they started primary school, they found those who had taken long compulsory naps were still sleeping an average of 21 minutes less each night – meaning they had stuck with the sleeping patterns developed when at preschool.

“The environment that is created for children at childcare can significantly impact their sleep patterns – not only across a 24-hour period but well into their school years.”



Recommendations for Sleep and Rest

The **Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines** recommend 10 to 13 hours of good quality sleep for a child aged 3 to 5, which may include a nap. However, all children have individual sleep and rest requirements; therefore, policy and procedure should ensure that all children have appropriate opportunities to sleep, rest and relax in accordance with those individual needs.

- ✓ Children need a comfortable relaxing environment to enable their bodies to rest. The environment must be safe and well supervised to ensure children are safe, healthy and secure in their environment.
- ✓ Do not force children to sleep. By providing a quiet, tranquil environment, children will choose to sleep if their bodies need it.

- ✓ Encourage children to rest their bodies for 20 to 30 minutes. If children are awake after this time, provide them with quiet activities for the duration of the rest time.
- ✓ Always respect family preferences regarding sleep and rest and consider these daily while ensuring children feel safe and secure in the environment.
- ✓ Conversations with families may be necessary to remind families that children should not be forced to sleep or prevented from sleeping.

Reference: The E4Kids Study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs, Overview of Findings 2016



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