

Preschool Sleep Without the Struggle

*A Practical Guide for
Preschool Sleep*



Welcome

I'm **Sara Reimer**, certified pediatric sleep consultant and founder of Prairie Moon Sleep Solutions, where I've been helping families find rest for over five years.

Preschoolers are full of energy, curiosity, and big feelings—which can make sleep a bit of a challenge. As they grow and become more independent, their sleep needs and habits begin to shift, often leading to new struggles for families.



Preschool Sleep Without the Struggle is your practical guide to navigating the preschool stage with confidence. Inside, you'll find practical tools and expert insight for common sleep challenges like bedtime resistance, night wakings, and dropping the nap. My goal is to bring more peace to bedtime, consistency to nighttime sleep, and confidence to your parenting journey – so your whole family can get the rest you need.

♡ Sara

Chapter 1

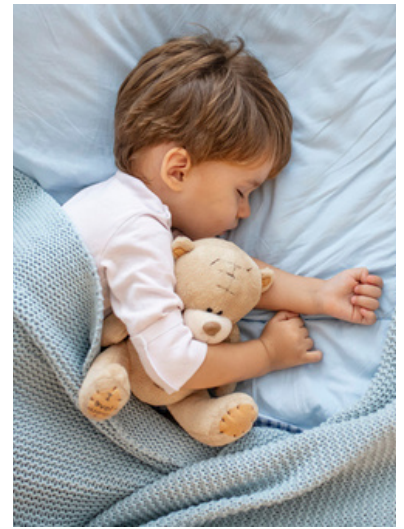
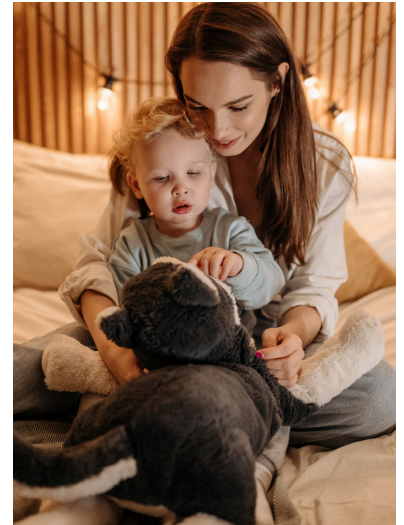
Create the Ideal Sleep Environment

Your child's bedroom plays a key role in helping them fall asleep and stay asleep. It's the space where their body rests, restores, and processes everything from the day. That's why creating a peaceful, sleep-supportive environment is so important.

Here's how to make that happen:

Keep it Simple – A clutter-free bedroom helps your child wind down more easily. Remove stimulating toys and distractions – the bedroom should be associated with sleep, not play.

Comfort Item – A special blanket, stuffed animal, or doll can help your child feel secure and relaxed as they drift off to sleep. Just one item is enough to offer comfort without overstimulation.



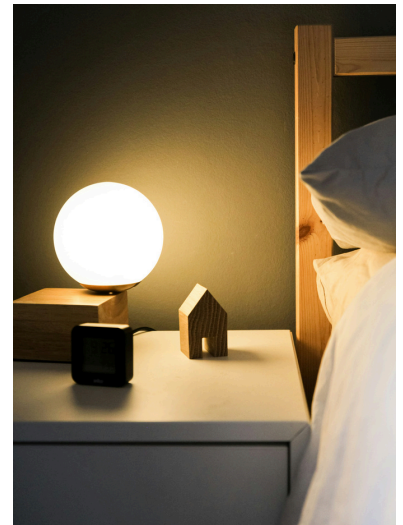
Keep it Dark – Children are very sensitive to light, and even small amounts can interfere with falling asleep and staying asleep. Blackout blinds are a great solution. Aim for 90–100% darkness at bedtime, during naps (if your child is still napping), and in the early morning hours.

Keep it Cool – Children sleep best in a cooler environment. Aim for a room temperature between 18–21°C (64–69°F).

Keep it Calm – Wind-down time matters. Turn off all screens and avoid stimulating play at least an hour before bedtime to help your child's body naturally prepare for sleep.

Keep it Quiet – Keep household noise low while your child sleeps. Run continuous white noise in their bedroom to help safeguard against sudden sounds and promote uninterrupted rest.

With just a few small adjustments, your child's bedroom can become the perfect place for restful, uninterrupted sleep.



Chapter 2

Build Predictable Daily Routines

Establishing consistent routines around meals, play, and sleep can do wonders for your child's overall well-being.

Predictability helps regulate their internal circadian rhythm (or body clock), minimizing sleep disruptions and improving nighttime rest.

Nutrition – Serve three balanced meals and two to three snacks daily at consistent times. Limit milk intake to no more than 24 ounces per day and transition to an open cup if your child is still using a bottle. Too much milk can impact sleep, overall nutrition, and even dental health.

Outside Time / High-Energy Play – Aim for at least two 30-minute sessions of high-energy play each day – ideally one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Physical activity helps balance energy levels and supports better sleep at night.



One-on-One Time – Spend 15 to 20 minutes of intentional, one-on-one time with your child each day. When children feel emotionally connected, they're more likely to cooperate at bedtime and less likely to push boundaries for extra attention.

Structuring the Daytime Hours – Here are general sleep guidelines by age, based on recommendations from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine:

Age	Daytime Sleep	Night Time Sleep	Total Sleep in 24 Hours
1-2 years	1-2 hours	10-12 hours	11-14 hours
3-5 years	None	10-13 hours	10-13 hours
6-12 years	None	9-12 hours	9-12 hours

Most children stop napping altogether between 2.5 and 3 years of age. Around this time, they typically begin to show signs of tiredness after being awake for 5 to 6 hours.

Avoid Overtiredness – A bedtime that's too late can lead to difficulty falling asleep and more frequent night wakings due to excessive sleep pressure.

Avoid Under-tiredness – If bedtime is too early, your child may not be tired enough, which can cause bedtime resistance or night wakings.

Sample Sleep Schedule

for 3-5-year-olds

The following is a sample sleep schedule to guide you as you create a routine for your child. Every child is unique, so please keep in mind that this is just an example — it's normal for individual schedules to vary slightly.

7:00 am – Wake Up, Eat Breakfast, Free Play

9:00 am – Morning Activities (outside time, independent play, and high-energy play)

9:30–10:00 am – Morning Snack, followed by Free Play

12:00 pm – Lunch

12:30 pm – Quiet Time (quiet independent play in their bedroom for 45 minutes or longer), followed by TV time (optional)

2:00 pm – Free Play

3:00 pm – Afternoon Snack

3:30 pm – Afternoon Activities (outside time, independent play, and high-energy play)

5:30–6:00 pm – Supper, followed by Quiet Play (no screen time)

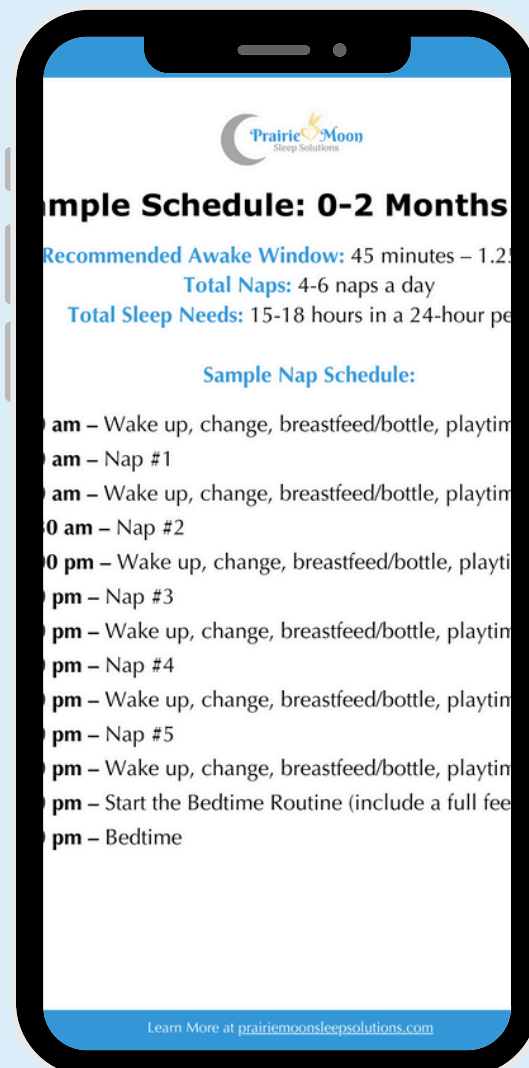
6:30 pm – Bedtime Snack (optional, depending on when you ate supper)

7:00 pm – Start the Bedtime Routine

7:30 pm – Bedtime

By building a predictable daily rhythm for meals, play, and sleep, you're giving your child the foundation they need to thrive — both day and night.

Download more sample sleep schedules for all ages [here](#).



Chapter 3

Dropping the Nap

There comes a time in every child's life when naps start to shift – and eventually need to disappear altogether. In this chapter, we'll outline the signs that indicate your child may be ready to drop their nap and how to make that transition a positive one.



How to know when it is the right time?

Typical Age for Dropping the Nap:

Most children are ready to stop napping between the ages of 2.5 and 3 years.

Signs Your Child May Be Ready to Drop the Nap:

- **Nap Resistance** – Your child struggles to fall asleep at nap time, showing little to no signs of tiredness, and may sing or play instead of sleeping.
- **Bedtime Resistance** – Bedtime becomes a challenge, with your child taking a long time to fall asleep. This can happen if the nap is too long, too late in the day, or simply unnecessary. While shortening the nap (such as waking them after an hour) might help temporarily, persistent bedtime struggles could indicate it's time to eliminate naps altogether.
- **Early Rising** – Your child begins waking for the day before 6:00 a.m. They may be getting enough rest between their nap and nighttime sleep and are simply ready to start the day early.
- **Skipping Naps Easily** – Your child occasionally skips a nap without becoming overtired or cranky.

It's important to look for consistency. If these signs occur four to five times per week, it's likely the right time to begin the transition.

How to Manage the Transition - Step by Step

1

Introduce Quiet Time

Rather than eliminating the nap completely, introduce a daily “Quiet Time” during the usual nap time. Quiet Time allows your child to rest quietly or engage in calm play. Use a timer or an OK to Wake clock to mark the end of quiet time. Sessions can range from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and it’s perfectly fine to start small and build up as your child adjusts.

2

Offer an Early Bedtime on No-Nap Days

On days your child does not nap, plan for an earlier bedtime — as early as 6:30 p.m. — to compensate for the missed daytime sleep. This helps prevent overtiredness and supports healthy nighttime rest.

Stick with it and be patient as it may take 4-6 weeks for your child’s body clock to get in line with this new change.

Chapter 4

Consistency

Children thrive on predictability and structure. Consistency is key for them to understand what's expected of them and what they can expect from us. As parents, maintaining consistency in sleep-related routines and responses is one of the most effective ways to promote healthy sleep habits.



Key areas to prioritize consistency:

- **Same Time** – Aim for naps and bedtimes to happen at roughly the same time each day. This helps regulate your child's internal clock.
- **Same Place** – Whenever possible, have your child sleep in the same location for both naps (if they still nap) and bedtime.
- **Same Atmosphere** – Create a calm, dark, cool, and quiet environment every time your child goes to sleep.
- **Same Routine** – Follow the same daily routines and consistent bedtime and naptime routines.
- **Same Response** – Be consistent in how you respond when your child is falling asleep, waking during the night, or waking early from a nap.

Consistency reduces uncertainty, strengthens routines, and paves the way for independent, restful sleep.

Chapter 5

Nap Time & Bedtime Routines

Just like adults benefit from unwinding at the end of the day, children also need routines that help signal to their body and brain that it's time for sleep. A predictable sequence of calming steps helps trigger the release of melatonin, lowers their heart rate, and prepares them for deep, restful sleep.



Example Bedtime Routine

(20-30 minutes)

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1

Bath or Shower (10 minutes): Helps release any remaining energy and signals the transition to bedtime.

2

Bathroom & Pajamas (5 minutes): Brush teeth, use the potty, and get into pajamas and pull-up if needed.

3

Wind Down Time (5 minutes): Read a book, sing a song, say a prayer — or a combination of all three.

4

Connection (5 minutes): Chat about the day and offer final hugs and cuddles.

5

Lights Out (1 minute): Turn on white noise, turn off lights, and lay your child down while still awake.

This routine should be screen-free, calm, and comforting.

Example Nap Time Routine

(5-10 minutes)

Nap routines should be short, simple, and done in the bedroom with the curtains closed and dim lights.

1

Bathroom & Change (2 minutes): Use the potty or change the diaper, and dress comfortably.

2

Wind Down Time (5 minutes): Read a book, sing a song, say a prayer — or a combination of all three.

3

Lights Out (1 minute): Turn on white noise, turn off lights, and lay your child down while still awake.

Chapter 6

Eliminate Sleep Props

A **sleep prop** – sometimes called a sleep association – is anything external your child depends on to fall asleep. For preschoolers, common sleep props include:

- Feeding to sleep or until drowsy (with bottles or sippy cups)
- Pacifiers
- Touch (patting, stroking, rubbing, etc.)
- Parental presence (holding, co-sleeping, or staying in the room)

The way your child falls asleep at bedtime is often how they expect to fall back asleep after overnight wake-ups or short naps.

Helping your child learn to fall asleep independently – without relying on props – is essential for deeper, uninterrupted sleep.



The best way to phase out sleep props is to **gently adjust your child's habits while giving them the support they need** to build strong, independent sleep skills.

Keep in mind, as preschoolers develop independence, they naturally **test boundaries** — especially around bedtime. If limits are inconsistent, children often feel insecure, leading to even more resistance.

In the next chapter we'll explore ways to manage your child's protest & overwhelm, should it happen.



Chapter 7

Managing Protest & Overwhelm



Establishing clear, consistent boundaries not only eases bedtime struggles but also reassures your child that you are confidently guiding them. Although resetting the balance takes patience and effort, **the reward is a peaceful, confident child who goes to bed with ease.**

Tips for Managing Protest & Overwhelm

1

Keep the Bedtime Routine Consistent

Consistency is crucial. Stick to the same steps every night, no matter how much your child protests. Children quickly learn that routines are non-negotiable when caregivers stay calm and consistent. All caregivers should follow the same rules and structure for maximum success.

2

Remind the Rules and Encourage Independence

Here are ways you can support your child's independence:

- Use a calendar to show which parent is doing bedtime.
- Post a bedtime routine chart in your child's room (Download a free one [here](#))
- Step back when appropriate and let your child complete bedtime tasks on their own.

3

Offer Warnings

A 5-minute and then a 2-minute warning helps your child mentally prepare for transitions.

4

Make It Fun

Make the transitions fun! Fly to the bathroom like a rocket or polish your child's "rock teeth" with the toothbrush.

5

Show Empathy and Compassion

Stay calm, acknowledge feelings, and gently reaffirm the limit:

"I see you're upset you have to stop playing. It's okay to be sad. It's still bedtime — let's head to bed together."

During tantrums, stay present, calm, and kind. Sometimes just being there without fixing anything is enough.

6

Offer Choices

Help your child feel empowered by offering two equally positive choices, like:

- *"Do you want the blue pajamas or the green ones?"*
- *"Which two books shall we read tonight?"*

7

Use Natural Consequences

When it's safe to do so, allow natural consequences to help your child learn.

Example: If your child refuses to brush their teeth at bedtime, explain that they'll need to avoid sugary treats for the next day to help prevent cavities.

Managing bedtime protest takes patience, but by staying consistent with routines, setting gentle limits, and showing empathy, you can help turn bedtime struggles into calm, confident sleep for your child.

That's a wrap!

That wraps up your guide to *Preschool Sleep Without the Struggle!* These strategies form the building blocks of restful, independent sleep.

However, **sleep is complex**. Much like a jigsaw puzzle, all these pieces need to be present and in the right place. If even one piece is missing or out of place, it can leave you feeling uncertain and result in your child crying or protesting far more than expected.



Remember, every child — and every family — is unique. What works well for one child might not work the same for another.

I'm here to help...

If you've been putting these strategies into practice but are still running into challenges, I invite you to **book a free call with me [here](#)**. We'll talk about your child's specific sleep situation and how I can support your family's journey to better rest.



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