



Peaceful Bedtimes

A Simple, Practical Sleep Guide
for Ages 1–8

Introduction

If you purchased this guide, you're probably exhausted — physically and emotionally. Bedtime was supposed to be the calm end to your day. Instead, it feels like hours of negotiating, extra drinks, bathroom trips, and constant reminders to lie down.

You're not alone. Our family has been there many times.

This guide is intentionally simple, practical, and realistic. It's designed for tired parents who don't want theory — they want something that works.

When these steps are followed consistently, most families see bedtime shorten dramatically. What once took hours often becomes a calm, predictable routine that helps children fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

This guide is not medical advice. If your child has a diagnosed medical condition, you'll find guidance on when to explore that further at the end. Otherwise, let's focus on the basics that signal safety, calm, and rest to a child's body.

You do not need perfection. You need consistency.

Step 1: Schedule (The Foundation)

Children's bodies thrive on predictability. Sleep hormones respond to routine and timing, not negotiation or exhaustion.

A consistent bedtime teaches the body when to release melatonin – the hormone that supports sleep. When bedtime changes often, the body stays alert longer.

Choosing a Bedtime

Count backwards 10–11 hours from your child's wake-up time

Choose a bedtime that works for your household

Avoid putting children to bed significantly earlier or later for convenience

Once chosen, keep bedtime the same every night, including weekends.

Bedtime Routine Order

Children don't just need the same tasks – they need the same order.

A predictable sequence signals the brain that sleep is coming.

☒ Do This Tonight (Schedule)

- ☐ Choose a consistent bedtime
- ☐ Choose a consistent wake-up time
- ☐ Keep bedtime the same every day
- ☐ Follow the same routine order nightly
- ☐ Avoid food within 2 hours of bedtime

Step 2: Diet (Supporting Calm)

What children eat and drink directly affects their ability to settle.

This section is based on personal experience and general nutrition principles — not medical advice.

Sugar

Excess sugar causes energy spikes and crashes that interfere with sleep.

You do not need to eliminate all sugar. Focus on reducing it, especially later in the day.

Helpful swaps:

Choose fruit packed in juice instead of syrup

Use real maple syrup instead of artificial syrups

Read labels for hidden sugars

Drinks

Avoid caffeine entirely for young children. Remember that chocolate contains caffeine, especially dark chocolate.

Specific Recommendation (Optional): Zevia is a zero-sugar soda sweetened without artificial dyes. We use it solely in our home. I have no affiliation with this brand — it's simply a specific option parents often appreciate not having to search for.

Dyes & Preservatives

Many families notice improved behavior and sleep when reducing artificial dyes and preservatives. If this is new for your family, try it for three weeks and observe changes.

☒ Do This Tonight (Diet)

- ☐ Avoid sugar after dinner
- ☐ Skip chocolate in the evening
- ☐ Offer water instead of sweet drinks
- ☐ Reduce artificial dyes where possible

Step 3: Exercise (Releasing Energy)

Children store energy throughout the day. If it isn't released, it often shows up at bedtime.

In many cases, the commonly recommended minimum of activity simply isn't enough to fully regulate young bodies.

Aim for at least 60 minutes of active movement daily.

Great Options by Age

Ages 1–3

Climbing

Pushing toys

Dancing

Ages 4–6

Running games

Playground time

Obstacle courses

Ages 7–8

Sports

Hiking

Biking

Indoor days count too — dancing, movement games, and active play all help.

✅ Do This Tonight (Exercise)

- ☐ Prioritize outdoor play when possible
- ☐ Aim for 60 minutes of movement
- ☐ Use indoor movement on bad-weather days
- ☐ Avoid calm-only days

Step 4: Screen Time (Protecting Sleep Signals)

Screens stimulate the brain and interfere with natural sleep signals, especially close to bedtime.

You don't have to choose extremes to see improvement.

Choose the Option That Fits Your Family

Best Option ☐ No screens after dinner ☐ No fast-paced or cliffhanger shows

Better-Than-Now Option ☐ Screens off at least 2 hours before bed ☐ Screens end before bedtime routine begins

Progress is more effective than perfection.

☒ Do This Tonight (Screens)

- ☐ Turn screens off earlier
- ☐ Replace screens with calm activities
- ☐ Keep evenings predictable