

# Why bedtime feels like a battle every night

**If bedtime has become the hardest part of your day, this guide will walk you through the biggest causes of bedtime battles and gentle changes that help evenings feel calmer.**

(You might even start **LOOKING FORWARD** to bedtime after implementing these changes - I did!!)



By Dani Scaletti  
Paediatric Nurse, Mum of Two &  
Certified Infant + Child Sleep Consultant



**Sleep Nurse Dani**  
@sleep.nurse.dani



# Toddler bedtime battles



**Bedtime battles aren't "bad behaviour"... they're often a mix of temperament, getting tired, craving connection, appropriate boundaries and predictable routine.**

**Toddlers are great.** They'll test every boundary you have... and then say something absolutely hilarious that makes you melt and (almost) forget it all. While it might not feel like it in the moment, these really are the days you'll look back on with so many fond memories. **But bedtime is one of those times that can feel especially hard..**

They're tired (aka wild, emotional, and very non-compliant), and they know they're about to be separated from you overnight.

## **It's no wonder bedtime can be so overwhelming.**

I've been there too. When my daughter was two, we got sleep support – and it was genuinely life-changing. Before that, bedtime was a battle every night. Chasing (wrestling) her to get PJs on, endless "one more books", more cuddles, running out of her room, and lying beside her until she finally fell asleep... But once we figured out what she really needed, bedtime became something we actually looked forward to again.

This guide will walk you through **why bedtime battles happen**, and detail these **three effective tools** to bring more calm, connection, and consistency back to your evenings.

- Build a calm, predictable bedtime routine (30-45min)**
- Make sure sleep pressure is right before bed**
- Focus on connection, while holding clear, calm boundaries**



# #1 A calm, predictable bedtime routine (30-45min)

Toddler brains *crave* routine; knowing what's coming next helps them feel safe, secure, and ready to shift from play mode into rest mode. A longer, gentle bedtime routine gives their body time to slow down before sleep. The tricky part is that the 'right' bedtime routine can look different depending on your child's temperament, age & sleep needs.

💡 *A bedtime routine that works well for many toddlers:*

- Bath & nappy/toilet
- PJs and sleep space ready
- Books and cuddles (in dim light)
- Predictable final steps (e.g., "Get tucked in, cuddle, chat about your favourite parts of the day, lights off & goodnight")
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## 🔍 **Did you know?**

A consistent bedtime routine has been shown to improve overnight sleep within just three nights — for both babies and toddlers.

*Mindell, J.A. et al. (2015). A nightly bedtime routine: impact on sleep in young children and maternal mood. Sleep Health.*

## ✨ **Let your toddler take the lead on what's included.**

When my daughter was two, her routine included going outside to check all the trees for possums and looking at the moon and stars. These days, she goes on a short walk (in the dark!) with her dad to walk the dog — and comes home very excited to tell me about how many possums, bats, dogs, and even how many moons they saw!

## **Rough play before bed isn't always a bad thing!!**

For some toddlers, rough play, chasing games and lots of laughter before bed can actually help fill their "connection cup" before winding down. The key is allowing enough time afterwards for their body and brain to calm again with books, cuddles, dim lights or quiet connection. Toddlers respond best when bedtime feels safe, connected and predictable... not rushed, stressful or full of pressure..



## #2 Check their wake window before bed

This is one of the biggest game-changers, and often the most overlooked.

Lots of parents think keeping their toddler up later will make them sleep better. But often the opposite happens. When they're awake too long, their body produces cortisol (stress hormone), which blocks melatonin (the sleepy hormone). This can make toddlers seem wired, hyper or emotional at bedtime instead of sleepy.

On the flip side, holding onto a nap for too long, or letting it run too late, it can mean your toddler is undertired, with not enough sleep pressure to fall into a deep, restful sleep.

### Did you know?

Research shows that overtiredness can increase cortisol levels, making it harder for children to settle into deep, restful sleep... even when they are exhausted. This is why toddlers can sometimes look "wired" instead of sleepy at bedtime.

*A.Scher, W. A Hall, A. Zaidman-Zait, & J. Weinberg. (2015). Sleep quality, cortisol levels and behavioural regulation in toddlers*

The tricky part is that overtired and undertired toddlers can sometimes look very similar at bedtime, and both can cause bedtime battles and/or lead to false starts, night wakes and early morning wakes.

### Signs your toddler might be undertired:

Their nap was too long or too late in the day

They're playful, cheeky, silly or restless at bedtime

They take a long time to fall asleep

### Signs your toddler might be overtired:

Meltdowns before bed

Seem wired or hyper (that second wind = cortisol!)

Fall asleep too fast, then wake overnight, have false starts, or wake early

Night terrors, or partial wakes before midnight – sudden screaming, sitting up in bed, etc.

### Typical wake windows before bed:

**12-18 months** 4.5-5hours | **18-24 months** 5-5.5 hours | **2-3yrs** 5.5-6 hours



## #3 Focus on connection, *with* calm boundaries



Toddlers thrive on **independence and autonomy** – so when bedtime feels like something that's being done TO them, they're more likely to push back. Even negative reactions can reinforce tricky behaviours (yes, even yelling can be rewarding if it brings attention!).

This is why bedtime battles can feel so exhausting... because the harder we try to "fix" bedtime in the moment, the bigger and more emotional bedtime often becomes. Toddlers need us to stay calm, connected and predictable, even while holding boundaries..

The tricky part is that one trick that works well with one toddler, creates more chaos for another. Some love playful approaches like racing the timer to get PJs on or "beating the clock" before bedtime... while other toddlers find timers stressful and respond much better to slower, calmer guidance.

### **Connection and boundaries work best when they're matched to your child's temperament**

Just like I've shared in my [instagram posts](#) about behaviour guidance, connection and praise work better than threats or punishment ... especially at the end of a long day. Feeling connected and emotionally safe helps a toddler's nervous system settle before sleep.

Instead of telling them what they *have* to do, make bedtime something you do *together*. Narrate what's coming next. Offer simple choices. Stay calm, even when they're testing boundaries.

✨ You might say:

- "Once you've got your PJs on, you can go and choose the books."
- "We've got time for two books – would you like the animal one or the car one?"
- "Let's do our special cuddle and then I'll say goodnight."



# Still feeling stuck?

Some toddlers are more strong-willed. Some are going through big developmental leaps. And some families are doing all the right things, but bedtime still feels exhausting.

That's where I come in 

**Toddlers are probably my favourite age to work with** – especially those 2.5–3 year olds with big personalities and strong persistence (just like my daughter!).

These are such wonderful traits to grow into... but wow, they are hard to parent!


This stage is all about **positivity and predictable boundaries**, and I *love* supporting parents through it... especially when they're at their wits' end, because I know how much of a ripple effect better sleep and calmer bedtimes can have on the whole family.

The tricky part about toddler sleep is that there usually isn't one simple fix. What works beautifully for one child can completely overwhelm another. This is why tailored support matters so much.

Together we look at:

- Your child's temperament
- Their nap schedule & routine
- Boundaries that match your parenting style
- Emotional regulation at bedtime
- *AND* a plan for what to do when they push back... hard

I'd love to help you get bedtime back on track, without the tears, stress, or second-guessing.

 **DM me or visit my website** to book a support call or learn more about my sleep support packages.