



Positive Parenting



**POSITIVE
PARENTING**

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When working with toddlers, there must be give and take. Positive elements as well as consistent boundaries and consequences.

We will first look at all the positive elements you can put into your toddlers' sleep plan. **I suggest you choose 2-4 of these** (From the list below) and implement them for **3-4 weeks** as you work on changing your toddler's behaviour.

You might feel silly, or like these things are futile, however I can tell you after working with thousands of fun loving toddlers, it's obvious when these things are being done, and when they are ignored. Success will be dependent on your positivity and enthusiasm as well as your 100% consistency around your sleep and settling approach.

Emotion Cards for Bedtime

(2-5 years)

A helpful way to help children with separation anxiety or sleep anxiety is by creating some simple emotion cards, such as happy, sad, angry, and neutral. It's best to set things up in advance if you know your child struggles with their emotions at bedtime.



Create two sets of emotion cards and have a designated place where both the parent and child can choose how they are feeling about going to bed each night.

For instance, the first night, the parent might choose the happy card to role model positivity, while the child might choose the angry face about going to bed. You can use blue tac to stick them to the outside of the door or the wall in your toddler's room. Then, explain to your toddler that you are happy about bedtime while understanding their emotions, whether they are angry, neutral, or sad. Try to ask them to talk about their feelings more if they want to, without trying to fix or judge their emotions.

Be understanding and supportive, and when it's time for sleep, you can tell them it's time for sleep and you hope they will be happy in the morning. The next day, take the emotion cards off the wall. Repeat this process each night giving words to what your child is feeling, and helping them to understand what they're thinking/feeling, rather than ruminating when they are meant to be sleeping.

Sometimes, your toddler may tell you they are angry or sad about bedtime, this gives you an opportunity to ask more questions. You don't necessarily have to solve all their problems. Just saying them out loud helps!

Example

“I’m angry”

Why’s that?

“Today at kindy Sam took my truck.”

I bet that was frustrating.

“It was.”

Is there anything else you’re feeling about today or bed time?

“Sad”

What’s making you sad?

“I don’t like bed, it’s boring”

I hear you, it’s hard to lie still sometimes, do you want to do some deep breathing, or read a book with me?

Sleep Message Board

2-4 years

If you're having trouble with sleep anxiety or your toddler's lack of impulse control, creating a sleep message board could be a helpful solution. Often, toddlers may resist changes to their negative behaviors, so it's important to approach these changes with positivity.

By creating a message board with pictures of bedtime routines and sleep-related items, you can have a calm discussion with your child about sleep and bedtime during the day instead of when tensions are high at night.



To make the board, you can print out pictures from the computer or cut them from magazines or flyers. Involve your toddler in the process so they feel more invested in the project. Talk to them about the pictures and ask their opinions. If they're interested in a certain book or TV character (Bluey, or Blippi?), find pictures related to that character's sleeping habits.

Take 10 minutes each day to add a new picture to the board and discuss it with your child. It's important to be repetitive and positive in your approach. If your child isn't interested or resists one day, don't push it.

Example:

“Look at this picture I got of bluey in his bed sleeping. Do you want to colour it in? Look at happy he looks in his bed. He stays in bed all night, he is so clever. Do you want to put the picture of him on your message board.”

Remember, creating a positive dialogue around sleep can change your child's thought processes and behaviours in the long run. Be patient and enjoy the process with your child.

Sleep Book

1.5-4 years

Great for big changes like no more feeding to sleep, lying with you to sleep, or a change of bedroom.

Creating a sleep book is another creative way to engage your toddler in a positive dialogue about sleep and reinforce new ideas without sounding like you are nagging a non-receptive child.



A sleep book teaches your strong-willed toddler about going to sleep in a way which makes you both happy and ensures your toddler becomes confident with these changes and gets enough sleep.

The sleep book role model's awesome behaviour at bedtime, it is personal to your toddler, they can relate to it, and if you involve them in the process they will be emotionally invested also.

You can create a photo book online using one of the programs which allows you to upload photos and write your own captions. I suggest you take photos of all aspects of your toddler's bedtime routines from dinner, to bath, pyjamas, drink, toilet, teeth, stories, in bed, lights out, sleep trainer clock on, mum outside the door and HAPPY! Your toddler asleep and happy. The clock waking up, and mum and toddler happy!

Get your strong-willed toddler to pretend to be asleep and look happy at the same time. Have some fun taking the photos.

The photo book is a positive story about your toddler's bedtime routine, and how well they follow the routine, include how happy this makes mum and dad, how proud you are of your awesome toddler.

They don't need to be doing all these things before you create the book. The creation process can be a fun project before you start sleep training.

The story should reflect the way you want things to happen, not the current problems. The morning part of the story explains how good your toddler feels when he/she wakes up after such a good sleep, and how proud and happy mum and dad are. Maybe even the positive consequence of such a good sleep.

- High fives
- Stickers
- Wish stones
- M&M's
- Special breakfast
- Star shaped toast (cookie cutter!)
- Special plate for breakfast?

You can read this book at bedtime, or throughout the day. The more you read it, the more you reinforce the message of how bedtime is going to run from now on.

When you create a bedtime book, try not to use negative language, this means not using statements such as “Riley doesn’t get out of bed” or “Riley knows he isn’t allowed the light on” or “Riley doesn’t shout or cry”.

When we use these negative “no” statements, unfortunately our toddlers hear “get out of bed, light on, and shout and cry!”..... They don’t hear the don’t, doesn’t, didn’t, or no.

Instead use positive statements which reflect the behaviour you are wanting to see.

Remember we are creating a positive dialogue about sleep.

“Riley stays in bed”

“Riley leaves the light off”

“Riley is nice and quiet in his bed”.

“Riley wakes up feeling so good, he is happy and dances all the way to the kitchen for breakfast.”

You don't need to be a professional author to write a sleep book, keep it simple, personal and on point for your toddler.

Role Play

Great for lack of impulse control, changing a sleep association like feeding or bed sharing, or coming out of their room at night.

Carrying out any role play is super effective for showing toddlers exactly how it is that you expect them to behave around a certain aspect of life. Children effectively learn most things through role play.

Role play the bed time routine



Our children watch how we eat, drink, talk and behave. We often only think about the bad habits our children pick up from us, such as swearing. But our children learn so much about life from us. Children often need to observe a parent on the toilet as good role modelling for toilet training, we sit down and eat family dinners to role play how to eat with cutlery and sit nicely.

Yet we don't think about consciously role-playing bedtime, or good sleep routines.

When does your toddler observe you falling asleep?

Or a sibling falling asleep? Yet we expect them to know what it is we expect and we get frustrated when they don't!

To successfully role play you would use a doll, or teddy or toy to role play a new bed time routine and involve your toddler as much as you can.

If your toddler can talk, they can tell the toy the bed time rules and what will happen if they get up etc. If they can't talk, they can watch as you do it. Then you can both stand outside the door and play make believe that they are crying or getting out of bed.

You can read to the toy, set them up a little bed on the floor with a pillow, try to make the routine as similar to yours as possible, but nice and quick to hold your toddlers' attention.

Then together you can hold the door shut, or do "silent returns", or 3 strikes. Get creative, remain calm, involve your toddler and clearly role play exactly how bedtime will be carried out.

If you are going to use praise or rewards or positive consequences in the morning, do the same for the toy or toddler.

Give the toy its own sticker chart, or sticker, or high five, or m&ms. You **don't** need to tell your toddler they aren't getting their own reward but their toy is.

Just praise the toy and give it the reward and explain why he is getting the reward, such as “well done teddy you stayed in bed all night, here is your sticker, I am so proud of you”. If your toddler hasn’t qualified for their reward carry on with your morning, don’t rub it in. The jealousy factor here is powerful, you don’t need to do anymore!

If your toddler has qualified for the reward then praise them both, reward them both and carry on with the morning routine.

I have observed a toddler get so jealous of his mickey mouse getting rewarded, that he threw mickey out of bed in the night so that when mum returned in the morning, he said “Look mum Mickey didn’t stay in bed all night”. At this point holding back her laugh, mum said “Yes Mickey did get out of bed, he will not be getting a sticker. But you will!”.

This demonstrates a very clear understanding of what is happening, and how powerful positive role play is. If your bedtime has been a drama for quite some time now, your child probably has no idea what it is you expect of them, this is due to inconsistent reinforcement completely confusing children.

This needs repair, and apart from very clear consistent routines, role play is the most powerful way to quickly rectify this.

Rewards

As parents, motivating our children to do things we want them to do can be a challenge. It may be tempting to resort to bribes and rewards, but it's important to understand the key difference between the two.

Bribes are often given in the heat of the moment, during negative behaviour. For instance, if our child is throwing a tantrum, we may offer them a treat to calm them down. However, this reinforces negative behaviour and can create a cycle of misbehaviour.

On the other hand, rewards are predetermined and agreed upon beforehand. They are given only after positive behaviour is displayed, reinforcing the connection between good behaviour and rewards. For example, we can tell our child that they will receive an ice cream cone once they clean their room or after they behave well during a doctor's appointment.

While it may be tempting to resort to bribes, focusing on rewards can lead to better long-term outcomes. By communicating expectations and reinforcing positive behaviour, we can encourage our children to develop good habits and behaviours.

Why Children Need Rewards

Rewarding your child for every little thing they do is not ideal. But it can be beneficial to offer incentives when they accomplish tasks that are challenging or less enjoyable, such as staying in bed when they don't feel like it.

Just like children, adults also need motivation and rewards to accomplish tasks. As humans, we respond to incentives, and we are more likely to engage in certain behaviours if we know there's a reward waiting for us. For instance, many of us wouldn't be willing to work overtime without being compensated.

Applying the same principle to children, and rewarding them can have a positive impact on their behaviour. However, it's important to find the right reward that's appropriate for the task at hand. Let's explore some strategies for selecting suitable rewards for your child.

Rewards are a clear positive consequence for following a pre-arranged set of rules or expectations, and these rewards are not mentioned when the undesirable behaviour is occurring.

Some people feel rewards are an undesirable way to parent, and that you are teaching your child to only behave in a certain way for a reward. But expecting a 1-4 year old to have an intrinsic motivation to stay in bed is not only unrealistic, it's not age appropriate.

Humans as a species behave and respond to rewards. You watch too much Tiktok because your brain is rewarded with dopamine, you go to work because you are rewarded with a paycheck. You don't break laws because you fear the consequence, and you carry out acts of kindness because you are flooded with feel good hormones as a reward.

Rewards activate a special pathway in the brain, this leads to your child feeling good, and wanting to seek out this stimuli again tomorrow!

Humans respond to rewards like food, music (toddler dance party before breakfast!), social contacts (high five, praise,) and affirmations, self or external.

Looking at this list you can see the expensive toys aren't listed, even if your toddler needs to get 10 stickers before the "big prize" the daily reward of a high five and affirmations are actually more powerful than the price of the toy or activity at the end.

How often we reward and when we reward is called by psychologists schedules of reinforcement, and these influence how likely your child is to engage in the behaviour again. (Like staying in bed all night!)

If we are looking to teach a new behaviour like staying in bed, or sleeping without a bottle, or sleeping with you, the best kind of reinforcement is continuous reinforcement.

This means reinforcement every time the behaviour occurs.

Once this new behaviour is more of a habit, changing to intermittent reinforcement is the strongest way to maintain this behaviour.

After you see the new sleep behaviour is more settled, switch to a variable interval. Sometimes you reward once a week, sometimes twice and sometimes 3 times! You can extend this out as your child gets better and better until the high fives are once a fortnight and the dance party is once a month.

Essentially your toddler doesn't know when the reward is coming, so they stick with the rules. The behaviour also becomes a fixed habit which doesn't require reward after a couple of months. Psychologists describe this as resistance to extinction.

Let's look at the argument against rewards...

Some parents argue that rewards kill a child's inner drive and makes it hard for parents to keep up.

But thinking about the simply change of staying in their bed all night, what is your toddlers motivation to change? It only bothers you that they come into your room and wake you up....

Parents worry that their child will grow up relying on external sources for joy, I would argue that this is about balance.

External rewards are powerful, use them wisely!

Teach your child to comply to simple requests day to day. Teach them to take pride in themselves which teaches intrinsic motivation. Affirmations from you can teach self-affirmations, which can encourage pride and joy in the art of doing the hard thing, or the right thing without an external reward.

Some parents will tell you they had to continue to raise the stakes when it came to rewards to get any response from their child.

This is likely due to 2 reasons.

The rewards were purely physical and didn't have any affirmations with them. Or they didn't switch to a variable interval once the behaviour changed.

The final reason why rewards may seem to not "work" or need to be raised, is that the child has no consistency day to day with having to comply to reasonable expectations. A child who is never told no, or who is always allowed to control the day, or the parent won't respond to a simple reward chart.

There are no consequences in their life, so rewards have to be big to have any impact.

Where as the child who knows that no means no, and that a request to tidy up the toys is followed through on by the parent, also responds to rewards.

We never say "remember your sticker chart? You won't get a sticker if you get out of bed one more time" - that's a threat.

We never remove a reward or tell a child during undesirable behaviour that they no longer qualify for their reward. - That's negativity and doesn't usually do anything except frustrate and upset your child more.

We never remind a child during undesirable behaviour “Come on darling stay in bed, mummy will give you the sticker in the morning” - that’s a bribe.

Rewards can be your child’s currency if you know their currency..... Do they thrive on positive praise and high fives? Do they love Dora the Explorer, or Paw Patrol? Stickers from their favourite TV character can be a great incentive and are often as cheap as \$2.

Do they want your time? Create a sticker chart, where 3 stickers gets them a one on one outing to the park, or pool with you and only you! Print a visual picture of what they will get, or draw a picture together, so everyone is clear on the reward and the process to get there.

Popular rewards with my clients:

- Stickers or stamp charts as explained above (never ever remove a sticker for poor behaviour).
- Immediate morning rewards for younger toddlers such as sticker or stamp on the hand.
- 1 m&m in the morning.
- Star shaped toast for breakfast.
- Pancakes or a special breakfast in the morning.
- Wish stones (magical wish stones).
- A piece of Lego needed to complete a Lego set.
- Tokens to redeem for new bed time stories.
- Coins for a small container to spend in the weekend at the \$2 shop.



Children under 3 usually do better with immediate rewards as they struggle with the concept of time, so explaining that “this weekend” we’ll go to the pool is often not effective, but a sticker of Dora is.

Rewards should carry on for around 3 weeks, at which point you can either start working on a new behaviour or just phase out the rewards as the behaviour has cemented a the new “normal”. Don’t get more and more elaborate in that time, keep it simple and consistent.

If it takes a week for your toddler to start to consistently get the reward give them 3 weeks of consistent rewards before removing.

When you phase out the rewards, don’t phase out the positive language and behaviour, this is always effective!



Any reward needs to be accompanied by positive language such as “hey buddy you are awesome, look at you! Staying in bed all night. Wow you did so great! Look at you, you little super star, staying in bed all night! I am so proud of you! You are so clever, I knew you could do it! High five, come and have breakfast!”

Without the praise and over the top acknowledgement even the biggest present and reward can fall flat. Your strong-willed toddler is used to being told ‘no’ and is used to you being frustrated at them. They want to please, and they love hearing they have done something right!

Build them up as much as you can, as life tends to try to push children down!

Do a dance, celebrate their success, this IS a big deal for them!

Sleep Meditation

Once stories with the night light on have finished, start animal sleep meditation. Let your toddler choose in the morning which animal they will be when they fall asleep that night, this is giving your toddler a limited choice and some control over their bed time. Once you know what animal they are to be, tell them to put their hands on their tummy (little frog, or little sloth, or little pony), and feel your tummy go up and down as you breathe, take a big breath in little 'frog' (or whichever animal they have chosen), and out. Good work little frog, now keep your hands on your frog tummy and wiggle your frog toes, now squeeze your frog toes tight, and relax and let them go. Good, can you still feel your frog tummy breathing in and out, nice, let's do some slow frog breaths in and out, good. Now squeeze your legs tight and relax them....

You keep moving up their body to their arms, tummy, hands, face etc, and this will help them get into a very relaxed state, ready to..... sleep! This should take 5-10 minutes tops! This can become a strategy your toddler uses as they get older and one they can learn to ask for even as a 4/5/6-year-old if they are struggling to sleep, they can request animal sleep meditation with you, and their body will remember this is their sleep routine. I don't expect this will immediately change their falling asleep pattern in one night, but it's part of the positive changes you can put into place.

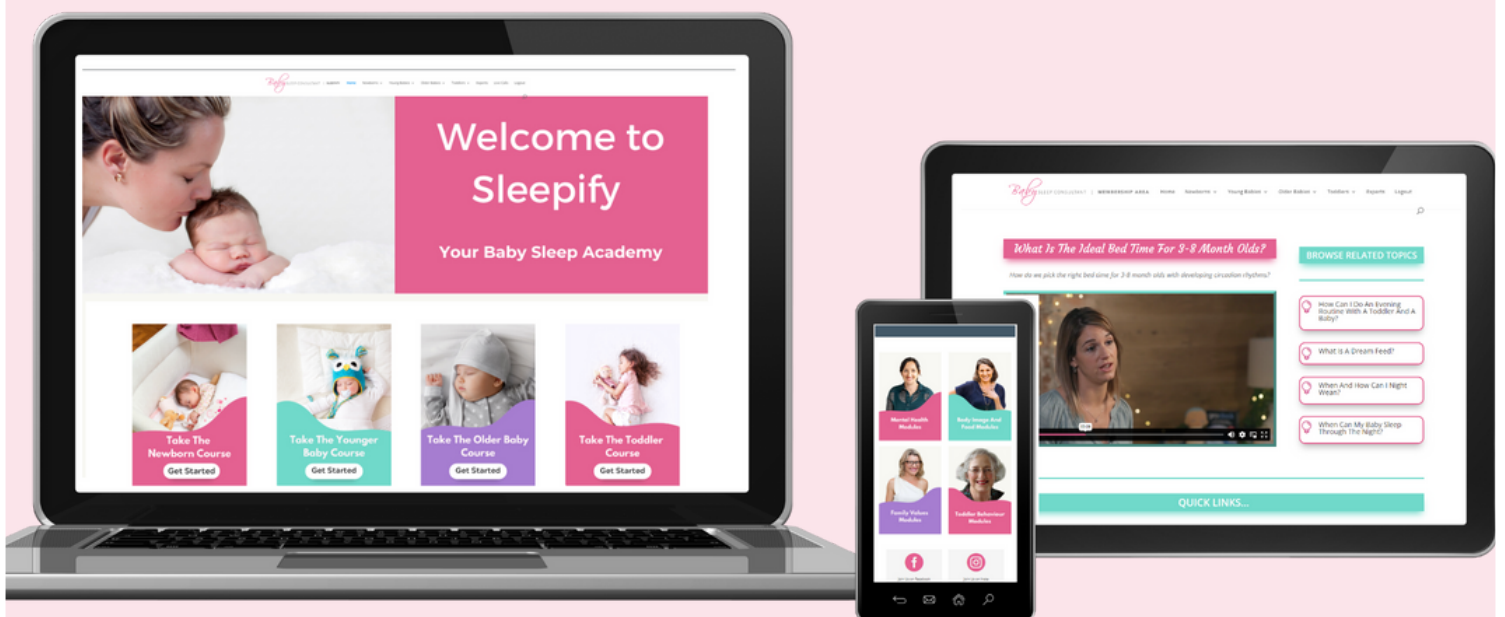
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Her approaches in child sleep have led to developing an international training company, certifying and training sleep consultants worldwide. www.babysleepconsultanttraining.com

Emma's team of consultants has helped over 50,000 tired parents around the world; they understand sleep in all areas, as well as parental stress and the emotional challenge we face as parents when trying to improve our children's sleep.

It's not easy and you only want what's best for your child. The Baby Sleep Consultant Team have many free resources on our website in addition to this sleep guide www.babysleepconsultant.co

We have live sleep Q&A on our Instagram every Sunday <https://www.instagram.com/babysleepconsultant/> join us for one soon!

If you need some one on one assistance we offer phone, email and home consults, please get in touch
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Emma is the owner and founder of Baby Sleep Consultant, she is a Certified Infant and Child Sleep Consultant, Lead Educator for Baby Sleep Consultant Training, Happiest Baby on the Block Educator, has a Bachelor of Science and Diploma in Education, she is a Gentle Sleep Expert and Mother of 3.