



The Early Riser

Understanding what makes your toddler tick - the key to a happy, well-balanced child



Articles

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We've all experienced that sinking feeling when the first bird chirps outside our window even though it is still dark outside. It's because we know that it will be a matter of time before we hear the first noises from our toddler who is now up for the day, and ready to explore his world! This is especially hard if you are not an early morning person, as the last thing in the world you feel like doing at 5am in the morning is interacting with a lively toddler.

The bad news is that some children are in fact early morning people, and are wired to "get up and go" from as early as 5am. Use 5am as a cut off time to begin the day with. Any waking before 5am should be classified as "night waking" and should be treated as such.

Here are some simple tips to help you deal with the early morning riser and keep your sanity at the same time.

- Ensure that your partner is an early riser before you decide to have children – if not, ditch him/her and find someone who is!
- Seriously though, don't be tempted to extend your toddlers bedtime in the hope he will sleep later in the morning – this seldom works!
- When your toddler wakes at 5am, try to keep interaction with him as minimal as possible. With a bit of luck, simply offering him his early morning drink and walking away with no further interaction works well. He will have his drink, then drift off back to sleep for a while, allowing you some more valuable sleep time.
- If your toddler is up for the day at 5am, try to give him a clear message that it is not time for loud and boisterous play, but rather quiet time lying with you in your bed, or playing with some toys in your bedroom where you know he is safe whilst you doze (don't forget to ensure that your room is a safe zone for him). If he is still in a cot, it may be worthwhile to put some toys into his cot when you go to bed the night before, so that when he wakes up, he can play in his cot for a while.
- In an older toddler (from around the age of 3 years), tell him that he is not allowed to come out of his room until the sun is up or the first bird starts to sing. This may take a bit of time, but it is achievable with patience and perseverance. Use incentive sticker or star charts to help him along.
- Another idea is to get a large clock for his room. Put it on his wall so that he can see it clearly. On a paper plate, draw the hands of a clock to duplicate the time he is allowed to be up for the day (for example: 6 am). Tell him that when the hands on the clock on the wall match the drawing- both showing 6am- then he can come and wake you up to begin his day. This will also take time and effort to achieve, but it can be done. Don't forget to always reward him in the beginning if he gets it right.
- A clock radio that is set to come on at a required time also is a great way to get your early riser to stay in his sleep zone for slightly longer in the early morning. Tell him that he can come and wake you up only when the radio starts to play, or the alarm bell goes off. This will also take patience and perseverance, but is well worth the effort. Keep using incentives to make it fun for him.
- Be organized the night before – have your toddlers early morning drink handy, a clean nappy and wipes at the ready and a box of interesting (and quiet) toys near your bed.
- If all else fails, spend this precious time with your toddler having cuddles in bed, going for a walk, watering the garden or feeding the dogs. Don't be tempted to use TV as a passive babysitter.
- Have faith, this time of your life will pass all too quickly. Soon you'll have to wake him up for school and when he is a teenager he'll sleep all day!

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