



How to help your toddler settle down at naptime

Published: Tuesday, June 22, 2010, 5:19 PM Updated: Tuesday, June 22, 2010, 5:25 PM



Amy Wang, The Oregonian

Today we're answering a question from a Portland mom:

"I would like to know how to mellow out my manic toddler, whose latest habit is hanging out in her crib at naptime for an hour or more, wide awake (she may or may not eventually give in to sleep; we tend to have at least one nap-free day a week). Some days quietly, other days talking nonstop. It's like she is in overdrive because she's learning so much and she can't calm down her little brain long enough to relax and sleep."

I passed the question along to Rebecca Magby, a **Portland parenting coach** who also worked many years as a nanny.

Magby said her first question would be whether this child is the right age to be moving away from naps. Magby strongly suggests that parents continue afternoon naps at least through age 3, if not 4.

If the child is under age 3, Magby said, "oftentimes when children are in that manic stage, it's not a situation where they're tired. They're overtired — they've missed what I call the nap window." Once a child misses the nap window, Magby said, "they get completely overstimulated."

So if a child is not able to fall asleep within 10 minutes of being put to bed, Magby suggests bumping naptime (or bedtime) back by 10 minutes. If that doesn't work, try 15 minutes. "If 15 minutes doesn't work, bump it back another 5 minutes until you find a time that works."

Magby noted that naptimes aren't, and shouldn't be, etched in stone — a child who once went down at 2 may need to go down at 1 as she grows.

Magby also suggested creating a bedtime/naptime routine. She strongly urged that parents incorporate music, not only because it helps the child transition into sleep but also because it helps with travel. "You can bring that CD with you, and even though the child's in a different environment (the CD) will help transition that child back into bedtime sleep."

What about a child who won't nap because an older sibling is up and playing?

Said Magby, "I'd ask the older sibling to go play in their room quietly for 15 minutes prior to laying down the younger one." That, she said, will send the message that there's nothing exciting going on and help the toddler be more open to sleeping.

What do you think? What works for you in getting a toddler to nap?

– **Amy Wang**

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