

Settling Cues

Guidance on settling your child to sleep and overcoming night waking



Did you know?

When we go to sleep our brain is very active and cycles through different stages of sleep, which is why people refer to sleep cycles! We all experience dream sleep, which is called rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and periods of wakefulness, as part of the sleep cycle, although we may not remember them!

What is a settling cue?

A settling cue is something a child associates with going to sleep. A settling cue could be an object, a person, or an action. Sometimes children have several settling cues. Here are some examples:

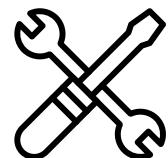


Objects: devices can act as settling cues if a child falls asleep playing on a device or watching the TV. If the parent turns the device off or removes it when the child is asleep, the child may wake in the night and want the device back on again, and this can lead to problems with night waking! Dummies and bottles can also act as settling cues. When dummies fall out in the night the child may cry and need the parent to find it and replace it.

People can act as settling cues too. If a child falls asleep with a parent/carer sitting or lying next to them if they wake in the night and the person is not there the child may cry and need the person to return in order to return to sleep.

Actions such as being patted, rocked, or stroked can also act as settling cues. If the child falls asleep being patted, rocked, or stroked when they wake in the night the child may cry and need the person to repeat the same action in order to return to sleep.

Once awake some children find it difficult to resettle and may be awake for hours.



Top Tips Tool Kit

There are lots of different ways to help your child to learn fall asleep without a settling cue, here are some ideas:

Objects: For young children who are having a bottle or breast feed before bed try to rouse them slightly before you put them in their cot, so they don't fall asleep sucking. See devices guidance sheet for further ideas.

People: Try sitting on a chair or stool rather than the bed whilst your child falls asleep. You can then gradually move the chair away from the child's bed and towards the door.

Actions: You could gradually reduce the action. For example, slow down the pace of the patting, rocking, or stroking. Then begin to pause between the pats, rocks, or strokes. Then gradually increase the length of the pauses. You could then use a slow countdown to finish the action, e.g., "5, 4, 3, 2, 1 stroking has finished, time to sleep". You may then need to work on removing yourself from the bedroom.