

Some children awaken before their parents do, usually between 5 and 6 AM. These 1 to 3 year olds are well rested and raring to go. They come out of their room or call out from the crib and want everyone to wake up. They are excited about the new day and want to share it with you. If people don't respond, they make a racket. Such a child is a morning person.

Causes

Most of these children have received plenty of sleep. They are no longer tired. They are not awakening early on purpose. Most of them were put to bed too early the night before, had too many naps, or had naps that were too long. (*Note:* Early morning naps that begin within 2 hours after breakfast also contribute to early morning awakening.) Some of them have a reduced sleep requirement—one that is below the average of 10 to 12 hours per night that most children 1 to 10 years old need. This is a genetic trait. Such children often have a parent who only needs 6 hours or so of sleep at night. Other children may begin awakening early in the springtime because of sunlight streaming through their window. (This scenario is easily remedied with dark shades or curtains.) Finally, those children who are given a bottle in their crib, fed an early breakfast, or allowed to come into their parents' bed early in the morning may develop a bad habit that persists after the original cause (e.g., too much nap time) is removed.

HELPING YOUR CHILD SLEEP LATER

1. **Reduce naps.** Assume your child is getting too much sleep during the day. Many children over 1 year of age and most over 18 months of age need only one nap (unless they are sick). If your child needs two naps, be sure the first nap doesn't begin before 9 AM. If cutting back to one 2-hour nap after lunch doesn't help, shorten the nap to 1½ hours maximum. Also make sure your child gets plenty of exercise after his nap, so he'll be tired at night.
 2. **Delay bedtime until 8 or 9 PM.** These two steps should cure your child unless he has a below-average sleep requirement. In that case, proceed with the following limit-setting suggestions.
 3. **Establish a rule.** "You can't leave your bedroom until your parents are up. You can play quietly in your bedroom until breakfast." Also, tell your child, "It's not polite to wake up someone who is sleeping. Your parents need their sleep."
 4. **If your child is in a crib, leave him there until 6 AM.** Put some toys in a bag in his crib the night before (but not ones he can stand on). If you put them in before he goes to sleep, he may play with them for a while, fall asleep later, and sleep longer.
5. **If your child is in a floor-level bed, keep him in his bedroom until 6 AM.** Get him a clock radio and set it for 6 AM. Tell him he can't leave his bedroom until the music comes on. Tell him he can play quietly until then. Help him put out special toys or books the night before. If he comes out of his room, put up a gate or close the door. Tell him that you'll be happy to open the door as soon as he is back in his bed. If this is a chronic problem, put up the gate the night before.
 6. **If you meet strong resistance from your child, change his wake-up time gradually.** Some children protest a great deal about the new rule, especially if they have been coming into your bed in the morning. In that case, move ahead a little more gradually. If he's been awakening at 5 AM, help him to wait until 5:15 for 3 days. Set the clock radio for that time. After your child has adjusted to 5:15, change the clock radio to 5:30. Move the wake-up time forward every 3 or 4 days.
 7. **Praise your child for not waking other people in the morning.** A star chart or special treat at breakfast may help your child wait more cooperatively.
 8. **Change your tactics for weekends.** Many parents want their child to sleep in on Saturday and Sunday mornings. If this is your preference, keep your early morning riser up an hour later the night before. If you are using a clock radio with your program, turn it off or reset the times for an hour later. As a last resort, put a breakfast together for your child the night before and allow him to watch a preselected videotape.



CALL OUR OFFICE

During regular hours if

- Your child's sleep doesn't improve after trying this approach for 4 weeks.
- Your child has several other behavior problems.
- You have other questions or concerns.