

## DAY ROUTINES (Module 4)

### *Lesson 1: Key Principles of Day Routines*

An age-appropriate **day rhythm** prevents overtiredness, promotes better night sleep, easier and longer naps, supports your child's **development** and growth, and therefore results in a happier kid overall.

When adjusting your child's current day rhythm or creating a routine for the first time, keep these 7 key principles in mind.

#### **1) Wake your child up at the same time every day**

Start your child's day off at approximately the same time everyday. The exposure to daylight, social interaction and feeding will help regulate your little one's circadian rhythm, and encourage good naps throughout the day. Most children naturally gravitate to a 7am wake up (which is why all our sample day routines begin at this time). However, if you want an earlier wake up time due to work or day-care commitments, or if your little one naturally seems to wake up closer to 6am or 8 am, simply adjust the nap/feeding times accordingly. A 9am start to the day would be the very latest we would recommend in most cases, as we also want to maximize daylight hours for an optimal circadian rhythm and overall health. Keep in mind that regular early morning waking before 6am is often caused by over-tiredness, rather than an innate need for an earlier wake up time.

For the sleep training process, we do suggest that you wake your child at the same time every day, in order to help get their bodies into a good day rhythm. However, eventually you can either base your child's nap schedule on a fixed wake-up time (as in our suggested day routines) or adapt your baby's day depending on what time they wake up using the age appropriate awake times to create the day's routine. (If you do this more flexible day routine, it is still best to keep the morning wake-up time within a one-hour range (say between 7-8).

## 2) Observe age-appropriate awake times

At each stage of development, children have a maximum length of awake time they can tolerate. If a child is awake too long between naps or before bedtime, they become overtired, and falling asleep and connecting sleep cycles becomes difficult. Your little one might be overtired because of too little overall day sleep, too long awake times, or an unbalanced day routine. In contrast, if a child's awake time isn't long enough, this encourages catnapping and difficulty falling asleep as well, because the baby's sleep drive just isn't strong enough yet to fall asleep and stay asleep for a longer stretch, even if they are showing some tired signs.

Here's an overview of the awake times a child can cope with at various ages.

### AGE-APPROPRIATE AWAKE TIMES

AGE	MINIMUM AWAKE TIME	MAXIMUM AWAKE TIME
3 months	1.5 h	1.75 h
4 months	1.75 h	2 h
6 months	2 h	2.5 h
8 months	2.5 h	4 h
12 months	2.5 h	4 h
18 months	3 h	5 h
24 months	4.5 h	5.5 h
36 months	5.5 h	6 h

By awake times, we mean the time from when the child wakes up until they fall back to sleep. So, if their age-appropriate awake time is 2 hours, they should be asleep again at the 2hour mark, not just starting their sleep ritual.

After your little one drops the 3rd nap between 7-9 months of age, they may be able to cope with progressively longer awake times over the day, rather than awake times of equal length between naps, especially if they are on the “short - long” day structure (see the age-specific day routine pdfs in Lesson 3). This is why the ideal awake times we suggest in the graph above for little one’s over 8 months of age have such a large range (2.5-4 hours). We will discuss the progressively lengthening awake times for the relevant ages in Lesson 3.

**The most common signs of over-tiredness are:**

- ★ frequent night waking (often accompanied by crying or night terrors upon waking),
- ★ early morning waking,
- ★ catnapping,
- ★ difficulty settling to sleep,
- ★ hyperactive behavior, especially right before sleep,
- ★ not showing clear tired signs, or showing tired signs at illogical times,
- ★ a grumpy mood during the day.

**3) Be observant of your little one’s tired signs**

Trying to keep the age appropriate awake times in mind, also observe your little one for early tired signs. Often the early signs of tiredness are not as obvious as the later signs, but once your child reaches the late signs of tiredness it will be much more difficult to settle them to sleep, not to mention teaching them any new sleep habits! So try to start the sleep ritual as soon as you see early tired signs, so that by the time the age-appropriate awake time is up, they are already asleep..

**NOTE:** *Keep in mind that while you are in the process of changing your little one’s day routine and working on improving night sleep, their tired signs may be irregular, or show at*

strange times (ie. 30 minutes after waking from a nap). This is especially true of kids who have been constantly overtired because of their bad sleep. Some children on the other hand don't show any obvious tired signs at all! So keep the age-appropriate awake times in mind, while observing for signs of tiredness.



#### 4) Focus on a long, restorative midday nap

Our recommended day routines are built around a main nap at lunchtime of at least 1.5-2 hours. Depending on your child's age, there may be an additional morning and late afternoon nap. Based on our experience this **"short-long-(short)"** nap structure works best with most children. Firstly, it ensures that your little one gets the longest restorative nap in the middle of the day, when they will be the most tired. Secondly, once a baby starts to drop naps, it makes the most sense to keep the main nap in the middle of the day – this is the nap that remains the longest, till about 2.5-4 years old.

The second possible day routine structure, which we call the **"long-long-(short)"** nap structure, has 2 longer naps of 1,5-2h each, with an additional short third nap for younger babies. While this structure works well for some babies, we've found that it's often maintained by assistance from the parents (such as pushing the stroller to help connect sleep cycles) and the need to compensate for poor night sleep. Most children

have a hard time doing 2 long naps in one day and will switch to the “short-long-(short)” scheme during sleep training, once their overtiredness subsides.

### **5) Use biological sleep windows to your advantage**

Along with the development of the circadian rhythm, biological sleep windows develop by 4 months as well. These are certain times of the day where it is naturally easier for your baby to fall asleep, because melatonin levels are higher, cortisol levels are lower, and body temperature is lower. It's helpful if we can time the naps with these biological sleep windows for longer and better quality naps, not to mention it's easier for your child to fall asleep - that's a win for you both!

★ For a 7am wake-up, these biological sleep windows are at 9-10am; 12-2pm; 6-7pm. If your little one has a different schedule, for example, wakes up every morning at 6am or 8am, that would mean that the biological windows are adjusted respectively one hour earlier or later.

The biological sleep windows are the reason why it's hardest for babies to fall asleep for their third and fourth nap, if they are still doing those, as there isn't a sleep window in the late afternoon! Sometimes it can be helpful to do these late afternoon naps in the stroller or baby-carrier, until your little one is old enough to drop those naps.

### **6) Structure > Exact timing**

As you are making changes to the day routine, make sure to adjust bedtime and naps based on age-appropriate awake times and how the previous nap went rather than holding to an exact timed schedule, especially with younger babies. A good rule of thumb is that a 12-13 hour day is the MAX that most babies and children can handle without getting overtired, even when broken up by naps.

**NOTE:** The only exception is the timing of the first nap. Starting the first nap too early can encourage early morning waking, so the exact timing of the first nap DOES matter. We will discuss Early Morning Waking in Module 8 in more detail.

## **7) Optimize nutrition**

The main principle of nutrition and sleep is to ensure that as your little one gets older they slowly get more of their calories during the day, rather than at night. Most importantly, your child shouldn't be hungry going into a nap, or get too hungry in the middle of a nap. However, we also don't want them feeding too close to sleep, as this can become an unhelpful sleep association (see more about this in Module 6). Our suggested day routines take your little one's ever changing nutritional needs into consideration to promote adequate calorie intake as well as support healthy sleep habits. Check out our nutrition suggestions in Lesson 3 for each age group.

Go to your worksheets now and answer the questions for **Module 4, Lesson 1 - Key Principles of Day Routines.**