



REST FOR THEM. RELIEF FOR YOU.

A LITTLE DREAMERS PARENT TOOLKIT

The Back-to-School Sleep Reset

Getting your child ready for school mornings — not just an earlier bedtime

Shift the schedule and get the whole school routine ready, without turning the last weeks of summer into a battle.

Best for children ages 3–8

Rest for them. Relief for you.

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WELCOME

This Is About More Than Bedtime

A school-ready bedtime is only half the job. This guide focuses on the parts that are unique to school — morning rehearsals, school worries, and the actual first day — not just the clock.

ALREADY SHIFTING A SCHEDULE FOR SOMETHING ELSE? If you're adjusting for travel, a time change, or any reason other than school, our companion guide *Don't Wait Until the Night Before* walks the full day-by-day ramp-up plan in more depth. This guide assumes that same gradual approach and spends its pages on what's specific to school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends beginning the transition one to two weeks before school. Gradual beats dramatic — move sleep and wake times in small steps, expect some emotion, and protect a little connection time so worries don't wait until lights-out.

***In the app:** Guided Mode can run this whole reset for you night by night, so you're not flipping back to this page to remember what today's step is.*

PLAN THE TARGET

Choose the School Wake Time First

Age	Sleep in 24h	Planning note
3-5 years	10-13 hours, including naps	A napping child may need less overnight sleep
6-8 years	9-12 hours	Use daytime behavior and ease of waking to refine

School-day wake time:

Target overnight sleep:

Approximate asleep time:

Routine start (20-30 min before lights-out):

Example: a 6-year-old waking at 6:45am who does best on about 10.5 hours may need to be asleep near 8:15pm, with a routine starting around 7:45pm. This is a starting estimate, not a medical prescription.

BEFORE DAY 1

Take a Two-Night Baseline

Before forcing the target bedtime, notice when your child truly falls asleep. Note screens, naps, travel, or unusually active days — this tells you how many 15-minute shifts you actually need.

Night 1 — lights out / actually asleep / wake:

Night 2 — lights out / actually asleep / wake:

The shift, in brief

- ☐ Move bedtime and wake time 15 minutes earlier every one to two days.
- ☐ If your child falls asleep easily, continue. If they lie awake much longer, hold the current time one more night.
- ☐ Anchor the morning — wake within your planned step, open curtains, get daylight soon after waking.
- ☐ Move the whole evening earlier together: dinner, bath, screens-off, not just lights-out.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Pick tonight's 15-minute step and say it out loud at dinner: "Tonight everything is moving a little earlier." The heads-up matters as much as the shift itself.

For the full night-by-night breakdown of this ramp-up mechanic — useful for any schedule shift, not just school — see [Don't Wait Until the Night Before](#).

EVENING SETUP

Screen Sunset and Nap Timing

Create a screen sunset

Screens can keep kids alert and push stimulating content into the exact window their brain needs to settle.

- ☐ Choose a family screen-off time at least one hour before bed.
- ☐ Charge tablets and phones outside the bedroom.
- ☐ Replace screens with something predictable and quiet: coloring, blocks, an audiobook.

Check naps and quiet time

A late nap can delay sleep; dropping a needed nap can create overtired chaos. The right call depends on age and your child's current pattern.

- ☐ Keep naps earlier in the day when possible.

- ☐ For a child outgrowing naps, use quiet time instead of a late accidental nap.
- ☐ On a missed-nap day, consider an earlier bedtime instead of forcing the usual time.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Charge devices in the kitchen tonight, not the bedroom. That one change removes most late-evening screen negotiation on its own.

SCHOOL WORRIES

Make Room for the Feelings, Not Just the Clock

Children often delay bedtime because quiet makes worries louder. A specific daytime slot for questions keeps that processing out of the final routine step.

- ☐ Ask during the day: “What are you excited about? What feels unsure?”
- ☐ Answer what you know, and name what will actually happen on day one.
- ☐ Write down one unanswered question to ask the teacher later.

Say this: *“You don't have to solve every school feeling tonight. We can talk again tomorrow.”*

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Ask the two questions above at dinner instead of at bedtime. Moving the conversation earlier in the day is the actual fix here — not a better bedtime script.

MORNING REHEARSAL

Practice the School Morning Before It Counts

Morning stress feeds nighttime worry. Rehearsing while nothing is actually at stake lowers both.

- ☐ Lay out clothes and pack a pretend backpack.
- ☐ Practice breakfast and getting out the door.
- ☐ Notice where extra time is actually needed.

Say this: *“Today is just practice. We're learning what will make the real morning easier.”*

A calmer school-morning checklist

- ☐ Wake and open curtains — gentle light, same phrase each day.

- ☐ Bathroom and dressed — clothes chosen the night before.
- ☐ Breakfast — one or two reliable options.
- ☐ Shoes, bag, comfort item — a launch zone by the door.
- ☐ Leave — with a 5-minute buffer.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Pack the backpack tonight, even if school is still weeks away. A real dry run beats a hundred verbal reminders.

HOLDING THE LINE

Weekend Guardrails and Calm Boundaries

One late event won't undo progress — but a dramatic weekend shift can make Monday feel like jet lag.

- ☐ Keep wake time within about an hour of the school target.
- ☐ If bedtime runs later, avoid sleeping far into the morning.
- ☐ Return to the routine the next night without punishment or panic.

As the schedule gets real, expect testing

- ☐ Use a final-call checklist: bathroom, water, hug, questions.
- ☐ Offer only two small choices inside the routine.
- ☐ Use one short closing phrase instead of a new explanation each time.

Say this: *"We finished the bedtime checklist. Your body's job is to rest now."*

THE REAL THING

Dress Rehearsal, First Day, First Week

The full dress rehearsal

Use the exact school-night bedtime and school-morning wake time — pack the real bag, and take a short walk at the actual departure time.

The first school night

Excitement and exhaustion can collide. Keep dinner familiar, prepare bags early, and use the shortest complete version of the routine. Expect extra feelings while keeping the ending steady.

Say this: *"The first day took a lot of energy. Tonight we're helping your body recover."*

Protect the reset after day one

- ☐ Keep wake time steady, even after a rough night.
- ☐ Use the short routine — this isn't the week to add new bedtime steps.
- ☐ Expect after-school collapse — offer food and decompression before a detailed recap.
- ☐ Review after five school days and adjust based on mood and ease of waking.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

If tonight is the actual first school night, skip anything optional in the routine. Shortest complete version wins over a full one you can't sustain while exhausted.

SCHEDULE BUILDER

Map Your Family's Shift

One line per day: wake time, screen-off, routine start, and lights out.

Day 1

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 2

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 3

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 4

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 5

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 6

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Day 7

Wake: _____ Screen-off: _____ Routine start: _____ Lights out: _____

Small steps are still progress. The goal isn't hitting every time perfectly — it's reducing the size of the change your child has to absorb on the first school day.

In the app: Progress tracking graphs this shift automatically as you log each night, so you can see the trend without filling in every box by hand.

EVIDENCE & SAFETY

Sources and Important Notes

This guide is educational. It doesn't diagnose or treat a sleep disorder and isn't a substitute for your child's pediatrician.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics / HealthyChildren.org — Back-to-School Tips for Families, Healthy Sleep Habits, Bedtime Routines for School-Aged Children, Melatonin for Kids. American Academy of Sleep Medicine — Recommended Amount of Sleep for Pediatric Populations. Nationwide Children's Hospital — Bedtime Problems.

WHEN TO CALL: Talk with your pediatrician if sleep difficulties are persistent, disrupt daytime functioning, or come with frequent snoring, breathing pauses, gasping, or pain. Seek emergency care for severe breathing trouble, blue/gray lips or face, or a child who can't be woken.

KEEP GOING

More Help When the Struggle Changes

Every Little Dreamers guide is free and stands on its own. Grab whichever one fits tonight.

- Bedtime SOS — quick-match fixes for 10 common bedtime struggles, ages 2-7
- The Stay-in-Bed Reset — a 7-night plan for repeated exits and stalling, ages 3-7
- The Single-Parent Bedtime Survival Kit — a simpler routine built for doing bedtime alone
- Two Homes, One Familiar Bedtime — keeping bedtime consistent across co-parenting households
- Don't Wait Until the Night Before — a gradual 14-day plan for travel, time changes, or any schedule shift

All free at littledreamerssleep.com

YOUR NEXT CALM STEP

When the Night Changes, Your Plan Can Change With It

This guide gives you a starting plan. Little Dreamers, our app, keeps building it with you — a routine that adjusts as your child grows, a log that spots patterns you're too tired to notice at 2am, and a place to loop in every caregiver so the plan doesn't reset every time someone new is on duty.

Little Dreamers — the app

- ☐ Personalized routines that adjust to your child's age and your family's approach
- ☐ Bedtime stories and calming sounds, in English and Spanish
- ☐ Sleep logs that turn tonight's notes into a pattern you can actually see
- ☐ Caregiver sharing, so grandma and the babysitter get the same plan you do
- ☐ Step-by-step guided support for the nights a printable can't cover alone



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