

implementing a high quality naptime routine

by Lana Button

Your center might offer a top notch learning program, but what kind of quality do you provide when the lights go out? Naptime is designed to allow children to physically rest and emotionally unwind. It's a time of day where the 'care' in child care really comes into play. But the reality is that naptime in a child care center is often a part of the daily schedule that children and staff both dread. Here are some tips for planning and implementing a high quality nap routine that is sure to make everyone rest a little easier.

Hush Little Baby Don't Say a Word:

Setting a peaceful naptime mood

- Always give the children a 'heads up'



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education. She has taught preschool and worked in daycares from Davidsonville, Maryland to Vancouver, British Columbia. She treasures her experiences working with young children. Lana is now a freelance writer who has written many articles on various parenting and child growth and development subjects. Her articles have appeared in *Today's Parent Magazine*, *Parents Canada Magazine*, and *City Parent Magazine*. Lana also holds parenting seminars and enjoys guest speaking at various parenting meetings and workshops. Lana lives in Burlington Ontario, Canada, has been married for 15 years and is the mother of three beautiful daughters, ages 14, 11, and nine.

when naptime is approaching. Keep your pre-nap routine consistent and your class will start mentally preparing for a rest before they even hit their cot (i.e., children may wipe their hands or visit the bathroom before finding their cots).

- Keep children's cots in the same basic location each day. Once you find a spot where a child is most likely to get a good rest, use that spot consistently. Having to adjust to a new spot or a new 'nap neighbor' can make it difficult for a child to settle down.
- Allow children a few minutes on their cots before the lights are turned out. This allows children to transition from being very active to being very still. Your center might provide nap books or simple manipulative toys for children to explore independently for 5 minutes.
- Teachers are instrumental in establishing a calm mood in the classroom at naptime. Once the teacher dims the lights she should lower her voice and keep it at just above a whisper for the duration of naptime. This also includes staff conversations with each other. It's hard for little ones to fall asleep when staff members are discussing last night's television program. Once the

'unwritten rule' is established that naptime is a quiet time, children will follow suit.

- In continuing with this slow transition to rest time, it's a good idea to put on a short audio story for children to listen to once the lights are dim. This allows the teacher to gather naptime books and tuck each child in to give them a nurturing send-off to rest time. Make sure each child has something from home to cuddle.

Lullaby and Goodnight:

Ideal Naptime Music

The best naptime music is instrumental and continuous. Once you find good nap music, stick with it. The children will become accustomed to resting when they hear the music.

See the Sleeping Bunnies:

Naptime Expectations

It's important for the child care director and staff to establish high quality expectations at naptime, and to outline very clearly what nap is, and what it is not. Naptime is not a mandatory sleep time for children — it's designed as a rest time. Some children don't require sleep during the day. (And anyone who's ever had trouble sleeping at night knows that you can't make yourself go

to sleep.) No child should be made to feel like they are doing something wrong if they don't fall asleep at naptime.

Acknowledge that staff supervising a nap room are still caring for children who are falling asleep, who do not sleep, or who wake up early; directors can do their part of easing stress in the room by ensuring that staff are not given excessive chores to do during naptime. Children who stay awake at nap should not be made to feel that they are infringing upon anyone's lunch schedule or program planning time.

A high quality nap program considers a child's emotional well being by ensuring that children are not forced to lay in a particular way, keep their eyes closed, or lay still for the entire nap period. Children should be allowed to lay on their cots in whatever position is safe and most comfortable for them. Your center may ask that the children lay down to rest for at least a half hour. After that time, children who do not fall asleep should be able to sit up, roll over, or lay in any position on their cot.

Busy Busy Bumble Bee:

Planning 'rest time' activities

After an allotted period of time, children who have not fallen asleep should be allowed to do a quiet activity. You may transition the children with a book or puzzle on their cots while tables are wiped down and floors are cleaned from lunch. After a quiet activity is set up

at one or more tables, children can transition to that quiet activity (play dough, coloring, quiet manipulative toys).

Continue the quiet atmosphere in the room by keeping the lights dim, the music on, and voices at a whisper. This way, children who are not sleeping will still get a restful 'down time' and the children sleeping won't be disturbed.

Rock a Bye Baby:

Waking up is great cuddle time

Waking up at school can be an unpleasant experience for some children, and it's important to nurture children at this time. This is often a nice time for a cuddle. Once the child is comfortable, she can transition to the quiet activity table.

It's Raining It's Pouring, the Old Man is Snoring:

Waking up can be hard to do!

When naptime is over, there may be children still sleeping. It's important for staff to wake children in a soft and gentle manner. Scooping a sleepy child into your lap for a snuggle is an effective way to allow a cranky or disoriented child an opportunity to wake up and prepare for the second half of his day.

5 Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed: Transitioning from rest time to play time

A teacher can successfully transition the nap room to a wakeful state by changing the nap tape to fun sing-along music and then turning on the lights. Children who have been at the quiet activity table will be ready to move to busier activities.

A high quality child care center considers a child's emotional well being by providing a nurturing nap time routine that supports the staff and encourages a peaceful atmosphere.



Zachary's Corner