

Baby care - moving from cot to bed

Moving from cot to bed is an exciting milestone in a child's life. However, making the change is sometimes tricky. It may be hard to know whether or not your child is ready to move from a cot to a bed. Signs of readiness include climbing out of the cot or needing to get to the toilet at night.

Most children move to a bed somewhere between the ages of two and three and a half years.

A new baby

It may be necessary to move your toddler into a bed so that the cot is available for your new baby. Issues to consider include:

- If possible, make the transition from cot to bed before the birth of your baby or a few months after. Otherwise, your toddler may resent the baby for coming into the house and immediately 'stealing' the cot.
- Generally, a child younger than two is not emotionally or developmentally ready to sleep in a regular bed. You might consider keeping the cot for your toddler and buying a second cot for the baby.
- If buying a second cot is not an option, try moving your toddler to a mattress on the floor so that rolling out is unlikely to hurt them.

Safety issues

A 'big bed' means your child can get in and out of bed when they want. This may present a few safety issues. Suggestions include:

- Before you set up the bed, check your child's room for possible hazards. Could she tangle herself in the curtain cords? Could he open the window and fall out? Does your house have stairs? Address any safety issues first.
- Your child should be at least nine years old before you allow bunk beds. Children can occasionally fall out of bed in their sleep. A fall from a top bunk could cause injury. A young child who is told to sleep in the bottom bunk may climb to the top bunk when parents aren't around.
- Reduce the risk of falls by pushing one side of the single bed flush against a wall. Buy a removable guardrail that tucks under the unprotected side of your child's mattress. When you set up the bed, explain to your child that the guardrail prevents them from rolling out. Let them practise rolling against the guardrail a few times before their first night in the 'big bed' to reassure them that they can't fall out.

A quick transition is best

Some parents set up the child's bed but leave the old cot in the room just in case. This is not necessary. A child who feels daunted at the thought of sleeping in a bed may insist on continuing to sleep in the cot. It is better to make a quick transition. Suggestions include:

- Let your child help pick out sheets and doona covers for their new bed.
- Involve your child in setting up the bed and packing up the cot.
- Let your child know you are excited and proud of them. Praise them for being grown up and making the move.
- Find ways to celebrate the move. For example, you could have a family trip to the zoo or an afternoon tea party for extended family members.
- Consider marking the transition by redecorating your child's room. It doesn't need to cost a lot; just changing the pictures on the wall or covers on cushions will make the room look different. Involve your child in planning and decorating their new 'big kid' bedroom.

Common problems

Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a bed. Suggestions include:

- Stick to your child's familiar bedtime routine.
- Allow your child to stock their new bed with the items they find reassuring, such as soft toys. Your child may want to sleep with an item from the cot such as a special blanket.
- Try not to be impatient or cross if your child keeps getting out of bed. Be loving and reassuring. Accompany them back to bed. Offer lots of hugs. Say goodnight and tell them that it's time to go to sleep. Be prepared to go through this routine quite a few times over the next few nights, if necessary.
- Remember that arguing with your child and punishing them for getting out of bed will increase their anxiety and prolong the difficulties.
- Remind your child that the cot is packed up if they ask for it back. Reassure your child and praise them for being a 'big kid'. Let them know that their new bed will soon feel familiar and cosy.
- Install a night-light if your child's anxiety about being in an unfamiliar bed brings on other fears, such as fear of the dark. You could also tuck extra toys in their bed for reassurance.
- Try to be patient and reassuring if your child calls out in the night. Remind yourself that this rocky period will soon be over, and that staying calm and loving will speed your family through the transition.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and Child Health nurse
- Maternal and Child Health Line, Victoria (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- Parentline Tel. 132 289
- Tweddle Child and Family Health Service Tel. (03) 9689 1577

Things to remember

- Most children move from sleeping in a cot to a bed somewhere between the ages of two and three and a half years.
- Bunk beds should be avoided for children younger than nine years because of the risk of falls.
- Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed' – try to be patient, loving and reassuring.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tweddle Child and Family Health Services

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