

# How to Transition from Crib to Toddler Bed, without Losing (Too Much) Sleep

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Parents of young children all know that the most important thing for everyone to function happily is sleep. My first child didn't sleep consistently well for the first year of her life so throwing any kind of monkey wrench into our (finally!) successful bedtime routine was unthinkable. Yet some children are ready to make the big transition from crib to toddler bed as young as 15 months, according to co-founder and CEO of [Happiest Baby](#), Dr. Harvey Karp. The timing largely depends upon your child's physical skills, he says. Once your kiddo is starting to make their escape plan out of the crib you'll know it's time to say goodbye to it. And most kids do this by age three. So how can you do this without losing out on sleep? Here are six quick tips for making the transition.

## Plan ahead.

Don't buy a big kid bed on a whim. Take your time to figure out when the transition makes the most sense and space it apart from other big life changes, like starting a new daycare or school, moving

homes, or welcoming a sibling. If you're pregnant, Dr. Karp recommends introducing the toddler bed a few months before the baby arrives.

### **Have a family meeting.**

Certified Infant and Child Sleep Consultant and Child Behavior Consultant Renee Wasserman, P.T., M.P.H., of [SleepyHead Solutions](http://sleepyheadsolutions.com/) (<http://sleepyheadsolutions.com/>) recommends calling a family meeting to talk about the importance of sleep. You might discuss where everyone is expected to sleep and why it's good to stay in your own bed.

### **Set up the room for success.**

Get your child excited for a "big kid bed" with a stuffed animal or fun new sheets, Wasserman says. This kind of novelty might excite your child about the upgrade. That said, toddlers generally hate change and some may do best when they keep their familiar bedding, Dr. Karp says. Stick with your child's sleep routines and cues, like a lovey, white noise, a special bedtime story or song. And keep in mind that you now have a free-range toddler who can pop out of bed at any moment, says Dr. Karp. Be sure to childproof the room by placing soft blankets or pillows near the bed in case your tot rolls out, covering electrical outlets, and securing heavy furniture to the wall.

### **Act out together.**

To prepare for all potential scenarios, Wasserman recommends role playing options that include staying in bed. Ask your child what to do if they wake up and it's still dark in their room. "You can hug your teddy bear and go back to sleep, or you can stretch your arms and legs and go back to sleep," she says. Similarly, Dr. Karp recommends having your child practice putting a toy or doll to bed. You can also use the new bed as a place to bond as a family. This could mean cuddling, playing with stuffed animals, reading together, taking naps, giving massages.

### **Stick with it.**

It's important to manage disruptions in the same exact way each time. Be calm and consistent if your child comes out of bed. Simply walk your child back and tuck them in so there is no incentive to get out again, Wasserman says. You can do this with silent empathy or you can validate your toddler's feelings using Dr. Karp's Fast Food Rule: "You really, really, REALLY want to sleep in Mommy's bed," while still setting limits, "Now it's time to sleep in your special cozy bed, but I'll come tuck you in nice and tight!"

You might consider installing a gate at the door to encourage staying in bed, just be sure to make it fun and not seem like a punishment. Let your toddler help decorate it with stickers and such so it can be the door to their castle, Wasserman says.

### **Tricky tot? Try a clock!**

If your tot is coming out of bed early in the morning, try using an "OK to Wake" clock that will indicate when it's morning. Remember that these clocks are only as consistent as parents are at using them, Wasserman adds.

Ditching the crib for a real bed is like taking a little leap of faith. There's really no telling whether you'll lose lots of sleep during the transition or if it'll work like a dream. "Every child is different but with the right amount of preparation and lots of consistency from parents, kids can be successful within a few days, if not from the start," Wasserman reassures.

My daughter made the transition when she was about 2.5 years old and I was heavily pregnant. We kept her old bedding, she picked out a new cuddle buddy at the toy store, and we set expectations from the very first night. Of course, not long after she settled into her new sleep space I gave birth to her baby sister and we all lost a lot of sleep once again. But we're hoping to make up for it when they're teenagers.

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