



## Ten 'Top tips' for getting younger children to sleep on Christmas Eve!

When it comes to getting your children to bed on time the most difficult night of the year is undoubtedly Christmas Eve; especially for those hoping to catch a glimpse of Santa.

Here's some tips to make sure that they are bright and breezy, rather than fractious, under-slept and grumpy.

### 1) Agree a plan together for sleep times and sleeping arrangements

Start by setting out and agreeing bed and wake times. Then, if you are going away, or having visitors and changing beds around, talk through who is sleeping in which bed, too. Set out a plan for Christmas Eve daytime. Ideally, you should make the daytime as active as possible. Get your children outside to tire them. In the late afternoon start to wind things down. After your evening meal, make things slower and more relaxing.

### 2) Wake up earlier on Christmas Eve

Most children will be too excited to stay in bed until their normal wake time on Christmas Day. Part of the excitement for younger children is to be able to wake early, jump out of bed and open presents together. If this is your family, then you could also set an earlier wake time on Christmas Eve. This helps to stagger the impact on your body clock especially with children who want to open presents at 6am (or earlier!). For example, if you are planning to allow your children to get up at 6am on Christmas Day and their normal wake up time is 7am then set the alarm for 6.30am on Christmas Eve. This helps their body clock adjustment easier to cope with, and in turn helps them to fall to sleep a lot easier Christmas Eve evening.

### 3) Get outside in the morning

We now know that getting outside in the morning sunlight, even in winter, helps to strengthen our body clock and helps us to get to sleep in the evening. Equally, exercise helps sleep, too. So, combine both with getting your children outside as early as possible on Christmas Eve morning. Take a long family walk or even better play some sort of sport if the weather allows.

### 4) Keep the afternoon active too – but not the evening

The key here is that you want to get the boisterous activity, louder music, and even online games out of the way in the afternoon, rather than let them carry on into the evening. After your evening meal you could play lower key family games together. Cards, board games and then reading together are great ways to help them wind down.

### 5) Boundaries on tech use

Even though Christmas Eve is a special night - avoid relaxing your tech curfews. Ideally, all games on screens (even with blue light filters on) should be stopped at least an hour before bedtime, and preferably two hours. This helps children to wind down earlier. Older children's use of mobile phones should equally be stopped at this time. The stimulation of social media, in particular, has been shown to interfere with children's sleep.

### 6) Keep to your bedtime routine

Stay with your usual bedtime routine such as warm bath, brush teeth, story and lights out. Our brains love routines and a good 'sleep routine' helps sets us up to expect to get to sleep.

### 7) Countdown to bedtime

You may need to add a countdown for excited youngsters. This could be at one hour, half hour and 10-minute steps to give your children plenty of notice of the agreed bedtime.

### 8) Sleeping in a different bed to usual

For those children sleeping in a different bed, it may take longer to fall asleep too. This can be made easier by using the same pillows and bedding. Also make sure they have all their cuddly toys and favourite story with them. Making things as familiar as possible will help as it helps to mitigate the 'first night affect' where we tend to stay more alert in a strange bed.

### 9) Allowing extra time to get them to sleep

Discussions about Santa and reindeers often start as your children get into bed. So, you could allow longer for your routine if this is the case. Reminding little ones that Santa won't come until they are fast asleep is often a good intervention.

### 10) Follow the same bedtime rules, especially around technology

Our kids copy what we do, rather than what we say. Set an example by keeping to the rules around boundaries on technology and getting to bed on time. Children expect things to be fair so keeping to the same rules helps them to follow their boundaries around bedtime and sleep. This will set them up for a good nights' sleep not just on Christmas Eve but for the rest of the year too. Once your children are in bed on Christmas Eve, aim at keeping things low key, so they understand that they aren't missing out on any more fun.

Good luck and have a great Christmas from the Sixth Sense team!

