All children from infants through school age need to have an available place to rest when they are tired.

The Science of Rest & Nap Times for Infants

When are rest and nap times needed?
Infants need rest times on their individual schedules.

What are the guidelines for equipment and supplies?

- Each infant needs an assigned crib to use while in the group.

- Crib slats must be no more than 2 3/8” apart, and crib corner posts must be flush with end panels or no more than 1/16” higher.

- Crib mattresses must be firm, waterproof, and fit snugly with less than two fingers’ width between the mattress and the side of the crib.

- Crib mattresses must be covered with tightly fitting, machine washable and dryable sheets.

- There should be three feet between sleep spaces unless there is a solid barrier between the spaces.

- Any tall dividers that are used to separate sleep spaces must be see-through.

- Cribs should be cleaned and disinfected weekly or whenever soiled.

- Cribs should be cleaned and disinfected before use by another child.

- Bedding should be washed weekly (or sooner, if soiled) and stored in individual cubbies or containers.

What are the procedures for rest and nap time?

- Place infants who cannot roll over on their backs to sleep. Props should not be used.

- Place infants who can roll over on their backs to sleep, but allow them to remain on their tummies if they do roll over.

- Lock dropside cribs into position when in use.

- Set adjustable cribs at their lowest mattress height setting when infants begin to pull up.
• In the cribs, there should be no pillows, comforters, or other soft bedding that can cause a suffocation hazard.

• Mobiles must be removed from cribs when infants are five months old or when infants can sit and reach them.

• If bumper pads are used, they should be firm, secured to the sides, and free of long ties.

• A written record should be kept to inform parents when their children slept.

The Science of Rest & Nap Times for Children from Toddler Age Up

When are rest and nap times needed?
Toddlers and preschoolers need a flexible schedule for naps. School-age children need a place to go to rest and be alone or to sleep as needed.

What are the guidelines for equipment and supplies?
• Each child should be assigned a cot or rest mat designated as his alone to use while in the group.

• Cots and rest mats must be waterproof and easy to clean and disinfect.

• Cots and rest mats should be covered with snugly fitting, machine washable and dryable sheets.

• If not assigned a specific cot or rest mat, school-age children should have an available cot or mat that is cleaned and disinfected after each use.

• There should be three feet between sleep spaces unless there is a solid barrier between the spaces.

• Any tall dividers that are used to separate sleep spaces must be see-through.

• Cots and rest mats should be cleaned and disinfected weekly or whenever soiled.

• Cots and rest mats should be cleaned and disinfected before use by another child.

• Bedding should be washed weekly (or sooner, if soiled) and stored in individual cubbies or containers.

What are the procedures for rest and nap time?
• Store cots and rest mats so that one sleeping surface does not touch another one.

• Provide top sheets and blankets for warmth as needed.
Pillows and soft toys may be used.

Children’s pillows, blankets, or soft toys should not be shared, and they should be stored in individual cubbies or containers.

A written record should be kept to inform parents when their children slept.

The Art of Rest & Nap Times

Children of all ages have great variations in sleep requirements and habits. Rest times for infants need to be individualized to allow for sleep and rest on their own schedules. The room arrangement should provide for a quiet, visible, protected area for napping at any time of the day. Some infants may like a few minutes of cuddling and rocking before sleep, while others prefer to ease themselves into sleep. Ask parents to tell you about bedtime rituals, and try to be consistent in carrying them out.

Toddlers and young children need schedule and structure for nap time to give them continuity and security in their daily environment. Set aside a block of time daily when the room is darkened and activity quiets down. Consider a time that works best for the particular group. Children who arrive at the center early in the morning may have different needs from those who come later. Rest times scheduled too early or too late can cause stress for all.

Allow for the individual needs of children, and make accommodations for them. Set aside a quiet, protected place in the room where a cot or mat can be placed if a child tires and needs a rest. This flexibility allows for personal schedules. For children who need less sleep, designate a supervised area away from the napping space, and provide materials for a choice of quiet activities. Other children may not sleep but may need to rest quietly on their mats or cots.

Establish rituals for settling in at nap time that let children know what is coming next. For example, if nap time is after lunch, dim the lights and put on soft music as children wash up. Offer a special blanket, pillow, or toy to help children settle down. Even toddlers can participate in the nap time routine by getting their own blanket or soft toy. Let toddlers and preschoolers select a board book to take to bed. Read – or better yet – tell a story.

Children need to feel safe and secure to transition to restful sleep. Caregiver and child interactions should be gentle and respectful. Nap routines are a good time for quality one-on-one interactions. Take a few minutes to “tuck in” each child, quietly moving around to rub each child’s back and settle her blanket. A few soft words slow down the rhythm of the day and set the tone for rest.

Waking-up time has its own set of needs, and children’s waking-up routines are as varied as their sleeping ones. The end of the nap schedule should not be abrupt. Young children should rest until they wake up. If it is necessary to awaken a sleeping child, do it slowly and softly. Transition gently from sleep to activity time.
Children who wake before others should be allowed to get up when they are ready. Those who wake up ready to go can move to the quiet activity area. Others who take longer to get moving should be allowed to linger a while and get up at their own pace.

Encourage children – as they are able – to be responsible for putting away their own mats, blankets, and other special cuddlies.

When the individuality of each child is valued at nap time, the rest routine will become a welcome “sweet dreams” experience for both children and caregivers.

Reference