

Making the Transition from Crib to Bed

by Dr. Jenn Berman



One of the biggest toddler milestones, next to potty training, is the transition from crib to bed. In parents' excitement to help their children take that next big developmental leap or sometimes move a child to a bed before a new sibling arrives, many move their children to the "big boy/girl bed" too early.

Rocking the Cradle

Most sleep experts recommend

waiting as long as possible. Giving a child the amount of freedom that goes along with sleeping in a bed can be a set up for disaster. Prior to the age of three, which some experts refer to as "the age of reason" when a child is able to override their impulses and follow rules, you are likely to spend much of the night walking your child back to bed and attempting to contain him in his room.

So how do you know when your child is ready for a bed? Here are a few reasons and signs. Any one of these alone is not enough of a reason to make the change but a combination of two or more might be.

1) She Has Physically Grown Out Of Her Crib

If your child is too tall to fit comfortably in the crib you have to provide another option that will give her enough space.

2) He Is Climbing Out Of The Crib

In this case, the first line of defense is lowering the mattress

and removing climbing aids like bumpers, toys or books. The next option is a crib tent. Crib tents are a great way to keep your child safe. They are made of mesh and zipper shut on the outside to keep children safely in their cribs.

3) She Is Potty Trained And Wants To Use The Toilet At Night

If your child is completely toilet trained during the day, is able to get her clothes on and off without help, can get herself onto the toilet, and actually has productive bathroom trips at night it might be worth considering the transition.

4) Your Child Is Making Consistent Requests For A Big Bed

This tends to happen most often when a child has an older sibling to model the grown-up behavior. Make sure that you feel that your child is mature enough to handle the responsibility that comes with bed use.

5) You Are Expecting The Arrival Of A New Sibling

Many parents chose to transition

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a child out of a crib so that a new child can use it. You should always base the timing of this transition on your child's readiness rather than on your need to free up a crib. If your child is not ready, you can always use a bassinette, co-sleeper or borrow a crib from a friend so that your child can keep his crib. If you do transition, it is best to do it at least six to eight weeks before the new child or wait three to four months after the new arrival.

Get Ready, Get Set, Get Bed

If you decide it is time to make the transition, make sure that it does not coincide with other big changes in your child's life like:

- Starting preschool or daycare
- Weaning from the bottle or breast
- Discontinuing the use of a pacifier or any transitional object
- Learning to use the potty
- Moving in to a new house
- Overnight visitors in the house
- Going on vacation
- A parent's divorce or separation
- A new marriage

A few tips that can help make this transition a little easier are:

1) Make sure that you discuss the change with her so that she can prepare emotionally to give up her nest and be ready for her new space.

2) Read books about "big girl/boy beds." Reading is always a great way to present a new concept or big change to a child. It gets them comfortable with a new idea and gets them curious.

3) Let him pick out his new bed and sheets. Take him to the store with you and let him make the choice. You may find that giving him two acceptable options will be easier on him and you.

4) Safety-proof the room. In order to make the transition to a bed, you must make your child's room as safe as the crib was: put locks on drawers, bolt furniture to the wall, cover electrical outlets, remove objects that could be used to climb, make sure drapery is out of reach, remove potential choking hazards, put away potentially hazardous materials (plastic bags, disposable diapers, diaper creams, medicine, etc.), and remove toys that could be dangerous or distracting. It is especially important to install a safety gate in the room and at any staircases, just in case your child decides to wander in the middle of the night.

5) Make sure that you stick to the old nighttime routine. The security and predictability can help calm your child's anxieties. The only thing you may want to change is to make sure that the last 5-15 minutes of the routine take place in bed. In other words, you can sit on his bed and talk, cuddle, read a story or rub his back but make sure that he is in bed for a while with you in the room.

Making the transition is a huge milestone not only for your child, but for you too. Make sure that your child is emotionally and cognitively ready so that it can be exciting and fun for everyone.



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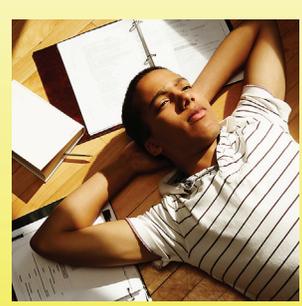
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