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Children with developmental delay take longer to reach their milestones than others of the same age. They may be late to use the potty or may still have tantrums long after their peers. In just the same way, they can take longer to 'learn' to sleep well. This may sound odd as most people assume that sleep comes naturally. However, all children need to learn a special set of skills to sleep well.

The first skill they need to learn is how to move from fun daytime activities to quiet bedtime activities. Tired children often get over-excited, not sleepy. So this transition can be quite tough! To avoid this, start a soothing bedtime routine an hour before your child needs to go to sleep. A visual timetable can help children move from one activity to another. To keep it as real as possible use photos of your child putting away toys, brushing teeth, having a story in bed, etc. If your child gets stuck on one activity, try using colorful egg timers to count down and keep things on track.

A really great skill for children to learn is settling to sleep without a parent in the room. This can be tough, as once alone in the room they forget what they should be doing next. If your child has developmental delays, don't be too quick to move them from a crib to a bed. Being in a crib is a great reminder that it is time to sleep. Once they have outgrown a crib, a gate across the bedroom door can work in the same way. See some great tips for helping your child settle to sleep independently [here](#). Once children have learned to settle independently they can typically do this again when they wake at night.

Remember that all children can learn these skills. But for some, it will take longer. And, all children need rewards and encouragement for getting it right.

About Dr. Catherine Hill

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