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Napping

Have you noticed that some children will fall asleep every day at the same time no matter what else is going on? These kids could fall asleep into their lunch if it is served too late! Have you known children who seem to fall asleep easily some days and other times just can't settle into sleep? These children might need a very stable routine. Some toddlers nap less and sleep more at night while others need to have a long sleep during the day.

Temperament and Sleep

Some of the different patterns in children's sleep has to do with their **temperament** (Jenni & O'Connor 2005, 204). Temperament is like the personality we are born with. Some babies are naturally easy going and adapt to new situations while others really need a routine that is the same every day. One child might fall asleep easily just by putting her in her crib or cot when she is drifting off to sleep. Another child might fall asleep in your arms but startle awake the moment he realizes he is in a crib alone.

Circadian Rhythms and Sleep

Something else that can make nap time easy or difficult for infants and toddlers has to do with their natural sleep cycles. Everyone has a kind of "clock" inside of their bodies that tells them when they are hungry or sleepy. The cycle of this clock is called **circadian rhythms**. Circadian rhythms are the patterns of sleeping, waking, eating, body temperature and even hormone releases in your body over a twenty four hour period. How much babies and toddlers need to sleep, when they feel tired, and how easily they can fall asleep are all related to their circadian rhythms (Ferber 2006, 31).

So what do circadian rhythms mean for EHS? For teachers, home visitors and families it helps to know that there are times of day when a child will feel more tired and ready to sleep, and times when children will feel more active and ready to play and learn. The times of day where a child is naturally more active or more tired are due to circadian rhythms. What can happen if we ignore a child's natural sleep window?

According to Ferber (2006, 275):

- A child might become overly tired and have trouble settling to sleep at nap time
- The child will be fussy or irritable and have challenging behaviors
- The child will have difficulty coping with transitions or conflicts
- When the child does have the opportunity to sleep, they might wake more easily

When infants and toddler's circadian rhythms are respected, they are able to get the sleep they need.

Meeting Each Individual Child's Sleep Needs

Thinking about the circadian rhythms and temperament reminds us how each baby is different. That is why it is important to have nap times that meet the needs of all infants and toddlers in your care. Helping babies to learn to recognize their bodies' needs and find ways to meet those needs is the very important skill of **self-regulation**.



Napping (Cont.)

When the children you care for are well rested you probably notice they are more engaged and focused on classroom activities. Everyone has an easier time coping with transitions or conflicts when they have gotten enough sleep.

How to Individualize Nap Schedules

Creating a space for sleepy toddlers can allow them to relax or nap when their body tells them they are tired. It can take some creativity to figure out how to let a young toddler nap or rest when they are tired. What do you do if a child won't nap when others are? How does one child rest quietly in a busy classroom?

Two and a half year old Henry is new to your classroom. His mother has shared with you that he does not nap during the day with her. When nap time comes around you can tell that Henry does not seem very tired.

What can you do for Henry, or other children like him, while the other rest of the class sleeps?

- Do you have a “cozy corner” that could also be a one child nap area?
- Are there soft places to sit and relax with a book or stuffed animal?
- Are there ear phones to listen to soft music?
- For older toddlers;
 - Are books or other quiet activities provided if a child isn't able to rest or settle when other children are?
 - Are children provided techniques and strategies for calming their bodies e.g. deep breathing, tensing and relaxing their bodies, feeling their heartbeat, etc.

