



Big bed ready

How do you know when your toddler is ready to move to a big bed and what's the best way to make the transition? **Dorothy Waide** gives us her expert advice

As with anything to do with parenting, the decision on what age to move your child from a cot to a bed is entirely up to you. The recommended age is between 18 months and three years, but usually you'll know when the time is right.

Over the years, there have been times when I have recommended babies as young as 10 months go into a big bed. However, in these instances the mattress goes onto the floor and we ensure the bedroom is totally childproof. This may seem young but in my experience, a lot of babies nowadays seem to not like being in a cot. This is not based on scientific evidence, rather my observations when working with babies around this age; parents often find they can transfer their baby from arms or their bed to a mattress on the floor successfully, but if they do the same transfer to a cot, the baby wakes up crying.

SAFETY

Before making the transition to a bed, it's important to ensure your toddler's room is childproof so they are safe if they decide to wander around their room at night. This means looking at drawers - can they jam their fingers? Wardrobe doors - can they open and shut them? Further, limit the number of toys out on the floor. I tend to store

toys in wardrobes or elsewhere, if possible. A gate on the door is also a good idea if you have a wanderer. If your child's room has blinds that have cords, ensure that they can't put their heads in the loop of the cord. This also applies to electric cords.

When you first move your toddler into a bed, they may suddenly realise they have a lot more freedom and can get out easily - sometimes you may find them asleep on the floor! It can take a little time for them to adjust to their new sleeping arrangement. Whether their new bed is a mattress on the floor or a bed with a base, safety rails will keep your little one from rolling off.

BED & BEDDING

When looking at what type of bed to move your toddler into it is important to consider the size of the bedroom. Many parents opt for a king single as then they can keep it until their child leaves home. Some parents like to make the bed itself the feature of the room; you can get racing cars and princess beds, Paw Patrol and Frozen-themed beds - all fun for a toddler, although not great for longevity.

The next question is what bedding do toddlers need. Do they need to go under duvets and sheets? When do they start using a pillow? As far as recommendations go, if your child



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is under 18 months, a sleeping bag is preferable to a duvet. After around 18 months old, I would make their bed with sheets and a duvet but keep them in their sleeping bag for as long as possible and pull the duvet cover down for sleep times.

In my experience with some toddlers, if they remain in their sleeping bags and aren't climbers, they will treat the bed like their cot and will not try to get out. However, some will still climb and in this case I put the cot mattress on the floor so that if they do roll out, they don't have far to fall. As your toddler grows and is ready to leave their sleeping bags behind, I recommend Sleep Walkers (similar to a sleeping bag but with legs) as a transition garment for those that don't like sleeping under sheets and a duvet yet.

As far as pillows go, again it is recommended they not be used for children under 18 months. Not all toddlers require a pillow, but if you notice your child propping their head up with their arm or a cuddly toy then

that's a sign they might need one. Because toddlers can overheat, it's important to check that the pillow is breathable, is made of allergy-free fillings and is as flat as possible.

Depending on the age of your toddler, some parents like to make it a family event and all go shopping for the toddler's bedding; maybe finding some with their favourite character on them. This might be a time when the whole bedroom gets a makeover and the baby décor gets replaced by something a bit more suited to the age or interests of your child.

To avoid putting a toddler to bed late at night in summer or them waking at crack of dawn, I recommend 100% blackout curtains or blinds for their rooms. From around two years onwards, children may all of a sudden want a night light or the hall light left on and that's okay as the blackouts are to keep the sunlight out of their room. Blackout curtains also mean you shouldn't have any worries over daylight saving time.

If you're wanting to use white noise, try to keep it around 50 decibels so that its effect is soothing not alarming. I don't think white noise is necessary but if you have used it previously and it helps get your child to sleep and stay asleep, then great! Keep using it.

THE TRANSITION

There are a few different ways you can do the changeover from cot to bed. One way is to do it when the toddler is out of the house so that it's all done when they arrive home. When they come into their bedroom you could make a big deal of it and say how lucky they are to have a new big bed.

Another way to transition is to do it a little more slowly and to allow your child to go back and forth from their cot to the bed. Some parents will get their toddlers to play on the bed, reading stories etc, before later making the transition for sleeping. As every child is different, you will need to do with what feels right for your child.

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The biggest issue with transitioning is when your toddler discovers they can climb in and out of their bed and come and look for you. There are different ways to deal with this, but firstly I ensure the room is 100% safe and that there are minimal toys available to play with if the child starts wandering around their room. Although it can be frustrating that your toddler is roaming around in their room instead of sleeping, they are exploring and checking out their boundaries and I tend to leave them to get on with it - they'll eventually fall asleep somewhere in their room!

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I would tend to close your toddler's door at night or 90% shut it with a door wedge so that they can't jam their fingers if they're playing with the door. Leaving their bedroom door open can be seen as an invitation for your toddler to bounce out of bed and come and find you. For wanderers, I suggest doing 'door patrol' which is basically standing outside their room and walking them back to their bed - this may take hours but will be worth it in the end.

In the lead up to bedtime, doing everything outside of their room can help avoid bedroom issues. I would read stories in the lounge before taking a child into their room, so that once they're into their bed it is simply a kiss goodnight and a song, and then I leave the room. Before you head to the bedroom, offer a drink and visit the toilet (if they are toilet trained). You could try saying goodnight to the moon on your way to the bedroom. Basically tick off anything your child might ask for when they get to their room, so you can remind them that "now it's sleeping time". I also often suggest telling them that the sleep fairies are coming to sprinkle fairy sleep dust, This can be a fun way of engaging their imagination.

There may be times when you need to stay in your toddler's room for longer

periods to help them to sleep. I suggest lying on the floor or a mattress next to their bed so that you can exit easily without waking them. There is no right or wrong way, it is what works for you. You might be like me and many others who choose to lie in bed with your toddler until they go to sleep and that's more than okay.

If you have an early riser, I'd encourage them to play in their beds with their cuddly toys or leave a book or two and their favourite toy out after they've gone to sleep so when they wake they will learn to play for a while. If staying in their room is not successful, at least you have the bonus of cuddles in the family bed before starting the day. Silver linings, right? •

Dorothy Waide is a Karitane Mothercraft Nurse with over three decades of experience. She's also the OHbaby! expert sleep advisor and resident Baby Whisperer. Dorothy is the author of two popular parenting books, *You Simply Can't Spoil A Newborn* and *Simply Parenting: From 12 Weeks to 12 Months*. Visit Dorothy at babyhelp.co.nz or [facebook.com/BabyWithin](https://www.facebook.com/BabyWithin) and Instagram [@dorothywaide](https://www.instagram.com/dorothywaide).

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