

- Child development

## Dreaming of good sleep spaces for kids

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STUDIES have shown that children with regular routines are better equipped to regulate their feelings, as well as adapt to new challenges and stressors. A vital part of a proper routine is ensuring children have sufficient sleep.



Sleep is far more than just rest and recuperation. It's a critical activity that supports brain development.

Toddlers require 12 to 14 hours of sleep a day, while school-aged children need nine to 12 hours.

Children who consistently get enough sleep tend to be healthier and more energetic. They are also more likely to be cooperative, cheerful and responsive, leading to better parent-child relationships, says paediatrician Dr Kexin Ng.

“Good sleep also helps children focus better, which supports academic performance. Sleep enhances memory, learning, emotional regulation and physical growth.”

Yet, getting proper sleep is an increasing concern for Malaysians. A study by the ‘Asian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences’ says that nine out of 10 Malaysians experience insomnia.

The World Sleep Trends study in 2023, meanwhile, found that Malaysia was among the top 10 countries with the lowest proportion of people getting the recommended amount of sleep (53.79 per cent) as well as the country with the fewest number of long sleepers (2.97 per cent).

But Malaysians are aware of the value of good sleep.

According to the “2023 Ikea Life at Home Report”, more than onethird of Malaysians find sleep to be key to maintaining a sense of mental wellbeing at home.

## SLEEP AND SPACE

A common challenge parents face is their child’s inability to fall asleep easily. This can be attributed to packed school schedules and extracurricular activities as well as excessive screen time.

However, one critical factor that is often overlooked is the sleep environment.

Malaysian homes face unique challenges.

There are multi-generational households as well as families in urban apartments with limited space and this can make it difficult to design restful environments for children. Additionally, with a significant portion of Malaysians residing in cities, the constant stimulation and non-stop activity of urban life can make it difficult for children to unwind and prepare for sleep.

Having a space that caters to children’s needs for play and rest while bringing a sense of independence and excitement can make a difference in their development and wellbeing. “A well-thought-out bedroom can significantly improve a child’s sleep quality,” says Dr Ng.

This is especially important for children learning to sleep independently, as they need to feel safe and comfortable enough to self-soothe themselves back to sleep if they wake up during the night.

A thoughtfully designed space should adapt to a child’s evolving needs, fostering healthy sleep patterns while doubling as a space for creativity and-play.

For families navigating small spaces, multifunctional furniture such as extendable beds and mattresses, or beds with integrated drawers offer both form and functionality.

A loft bed, for example, is a practical solution to optimise space, while allowing extra floor area for activities like studying or playtime.

Just as a cluttered bedroom can stress adults, it can also distract children, says Dr Ng.

“A clean and organised room not only fosters a calm and relaxing atmosphere, but also reduces distraction, preparing children for a restful night,” she says.

Additionally, parents should take steps to minimise noise from traffic or construction that might disrupt their child’s sleep.

Soft furnishings like rugs or soundabsorbing panels can help soften and reduce unwanted noise and make a room more inviting.

Creating sleep-friendly spaces is more than just aesthetics or functionality, it’s also about putting together an environment where children feel safe, supported and ready to grow.

Dr Ng says parents have the power to shape these spaces to inspire rest and play, providing children with the foundation they need to face life’s challenges with energy and confidence.

Most importantly, they can lead by example, making sleep and rest a shared priority and creating a better life at home for the family.