

## Transition from crib to bed

On an emotional level, the crib in the centerpiece of the nursery much like the heart is the centerpiece of the body. Important brain development takes place while baby is resting, and parents who look down on their sleeping baby often feel peaceful themselves. On a practical level, the crib serves another purpose: to safely contain the baby both while asleep and in the moments surrounding naptime.

For both emotional and practical reasons, then, transitioning our baby from the crib environment to a “big kid” bed is an often overlooked milestone for families. It acknowledges the child’s changing needs and is another way we can mark that our little ones are growing up. It can be a matter of convenience for the parent by allowing the child the freedom of movement to, for example, get to the bathroom on their own. On the other hand, it can remove the parental control of deciding when the child is out of bed. Either way, it is a transition that changes how the family deals with sleep and can be done in a way that can smooth out potential rough spots.

### What’s the best time?

This is common question I hear from parents who are beginning to think about making the crib-to-bed switch. Most parents make the transition between 18 months and 2.5 years, but here is no magic month (or even year). Some guidelines to think about include:

- **Child’s sleep skills:** Does your child go to sleep relatively easily on her own, or do you need to hover and then tiptoe out of the room? Babies who can soothe themselves to sleep can probably make the shift to the bed sooner.
- **Child’s motor skills:** Is your child able to climb out of the crib? If yes, the crib is no longer serving the “containment” purpose and, with sides up, might even pose a safety hazard. There’s no real reason not to make the move to a bed.
- **Family considerations:** Is there a new baby on the way? Your child gets very attached to her crib and will not give it up lightly for another occupant. Give yourself at least a 3-month window to transfer your oldest child before a new baby comes along.

### What’s the best way to introduce the bed?

Again, there is no one answer (if only parenting were that easy!) but I usually recommend a gradual approach as follows.

**Involve your child:** she is much more likely to accept the bed if she has a hand in choosing it or her new blankets, pillows and sheets. Look for a big kid theme that she likes and keep your mood upbeat, not wistful.

**Keep the crib up a while.** Many parents find that placing a toddler or child bed in the same room as the crib is helpful. Others lay a mattress on the floor next to the crib as a first step. These methods commu-

nicate to the child that she still has time to get used to the idea of a new sleeping spot. If possible, begin with naps in the bed and save nighttime transitions for a few weeks later.

Use bedrails. Bedrails are an important safety device for toddlers who are moving into the bed. Besides preventing falls, they're a natural extension of crib rails. Be careful about which model you choose,

Don't change your routines. Now is not the time to decide to remove the pacifier, the nightlight or any other helpful element of the sleep routine your child is used to. Too much change at once will just invite resistance. Let her bring her favorite blanket or stuffed animal into the new bed with her, as well. Don't worry about how it "looks"; what's important is how she feels going to sleep ---- at peace, comfortable and safe.

Even the best-laid plans aren't foolproof. Your little one will naturally experiment with the newfound freedom a bed brings. For parents, this can be frustrating, as a toddler scrambles around the bedrail and comes down the hall multiple times. For some families, closing the door or leaving a light on works, for others a safety gate in the doorway keeps the toddler in the room. Whatever method you choose, know that your job as a parent is to teach your child how to get to sleep on her own. Eventually, as your toddler gets used to her new arrangement, the disruptions to her sleep should disappear.

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