

SLEEP

What is the skill?

Sleep is an essential biological process that allows the brain and body to grow, repair, and organize information. Healthy sleep supports learning, emotional regulation, attention, memory, immune function, and physical growth.

What does normal development look like?

Young children gradually develop predictable sleep-wake patterns and learn to fall asleep with the support of consistent routines and caregivers who help them feel safe. As children grow, they typically sleep through the night and awaken feeling rested.

How does neglect interfere?

Neglect often disrupts a child's sense of safety. Chronic stress keeps the body's stress-response system activated, making it difficult to relax and fall asleep. Inconsistent routines, environmental instability, or unmet physical needs may further interfere with healthy sleep.

What might this look like?

Children may resist bedtime, have frequent nightmares, wake often during the night, appear tired during the day, or have difficulty concentrating because they are not getting restorative sleep.

Parenting implications

Rather than viewing bedtime struggles as defiance, caregivers can focus on creating predictable routines, reducing stimulation before bed, and providing consistent reassurance that helps children feel safe enough to rest.

From Understanding to Attunement

A child who cannot sleep may not be choosing to stay awake—they may have a nervous system that has learned it is unsafe to relax. Feeling safe often comes before sleeping well.