

Transitioning from a Cot to Bed

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In Australia an increasing number of babies and toddlers are sustaining injuries from falling out of cots and beds. This is due to either not recognising the appropriate time to move a baby or young child out of a cot, or a baby or young child being placed too early in an adult bed.

So when should we move our children out of cots and into beds?

Red Nose Chief Midwife Jane Wiggill helps to shed some light on this important topic so you can make safe decisions on when and how to sleep your child.

For safety reasons, when a young child is observed attempting to climb out of a cot and looking like they might succeed, it is time to move them out of the cot. This usually occurs when your toddler is between 2 and 3 ½ years of age but could be as early as 18 months.

Where to from here?

There are many options to choose from and you don't have to spend a lot of money to help ensure the safety of your little one.

Floor Mattress

One option is to take the mattress from a cot or a full height single bed and use it made up on the floor. Ensure the mattress is positioned away from the walls as young children can become trapped between the mattress and wall.

A child's mattress needs to be firm to prevent sleep accidents. Keep the area around the mattress clear of soft toys, bean bags, plastic bags or similar objects that a young child can roll onto. Soft objects could mould around a young child's face, resulting in suffocation.

Toddler Bed

Another option is to use a toddler bed.

Toddler beds are a safe intermediate step due to their low level, which reduces the injury risks from falling out of a bed.

They are cost effective, as the cot mattress and bedding can be transferred to the toddler bed once the cot is no longer suitable for them.

Adult Height Bed

If you have decided to use an adult height bed, be mindful that babies and young children are at high risk of injury from falling out of the bed or becoming trapped between the bed and the wall.

Make sure there are no spaces between bars or panels bigger than 95mm. Bigger gaps can cause a young child to become trapped.

Keep the fall distance to a minimum and use soft flooring materials or a mattress around the bed to minimise injury from a fall.

Keep the area into which a child could fall free of furniture, toys and other hard objects.

A note about portable bed rails

If you have decided to attach portable bed rails to an adult height bed to prevent your child from falling, be mindful that children can become trapped if the rails are not fitted properly. Before placing your child to bed check that the portable bed rails fit tightly against the side of the mattress and there are no gaps between the mattress and the bed rail. This will help prevent a child's body or head slipping through and becoming trapped.

Pillows, soft bedding and toys should not be placed against the bed rail. There have been cases of asphyxia in environments cluttered with soft toys. A young child can suffocate if their face becomes pressed against them. Wait until baby is two years of age and is no longer sleeping in a cot or portable cot before introducing a pillow for sleep.

Don't forget, a child no longer sleeping in a cot has greater access to all living areas which means greater access to potential hazards and of injury. Before your child graduates to a bed, check your child's room and throughout the house paying special attention to potential hazards that may result in falls, drowning, strangulation, entrapment or poisoning. Keep dangling cords, strings and mobiles out of reach as they could get caught around a child's neck.

Keep heaters, electrical appliances and access to power points well away to avoid the risk of overheating, burns and electrocution and ensure all furniture and TVs are attached with wall brackets so they cannot be readily tipped over

Ensure stairs and windows are not accessible.

Finally, alternative items used for sleep such as bean bags, sofas, large cushions and air mattresses are not safe places for young children to sleep.

Bunk beds are not recommended for children under nine years of age. If a child is wearing a baby sleeping bag whilst sleeping outside of a cot be careful! A child wearing a baby sleeping bag and not confined to a cot is at a higher risk of slips, trips and falls and of being injured. The child must be actively supervised and the sleeping bag removed as soon as the child wakes.

For more information on cot to bed safety visit:

<https://rednose.org.au/section/one-to-five-year-old>

https://rednose.org.au/downloads/RN3356_Cot_Bed_DL_Oct2018_web.pdf

<https://rednose.org.au/article/where-to-sleep-a-child-who-has-moved-from-a-cot>

