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I will go through children's sleep needs in different ages and how to best approach their sleep. To allow a good overview I will begin with newborns, and then move on to the 3-month-old child, then 3-6 months, and finally the 1-2 year old child. I will finishes with some concluding advice about sleeping rituals that you may find inspirational and useful up until the child reaches 7-9 years of age. I will concludes with a loving encouragement to you as parents that you need to remember to take care of your own sleep too.

INTRODUCTION

The Necessary Regenerative Sleep

When we as parents look at our small sleeping child, it fills our hearts with love. This deep satisfaction of watching your child sleeping safe and sound in their little bed is, I believe, universal.

It is wonderful to get a good night's sleep, and to get the sleep you need. In our sleep, we charge up for the next day's experiences and during sleep, we process the day that has just passed and detox our brains. Being human, we are dependent on our sleep, and one could say that having a good day is dependent upon having a good night's sleep too.

When it comes to small children, it is very easy to see if their sleep has been regenerative to their wellbeing and energy, or if the child doesn't get enough sleep and has perhaps even suffered from lack of it over a long period of time. It is equally easy to observe that well rested children are far more capable of developing healthily and engaging socially with other children in for example day care centre than children

who have not had enough sleep. It is very taxing for children to be outside their own home environment; they have to relate to lots of other people at a time when they naturally would engaged more with their own physical and inner development. The basis for any child being able to cope with the world is of course that it is healthy, but also well rested.

Children who are at their best get a lot more out of life. We know this from our own experience as adults too. When we are well-rested we are more prepared to tackle life's' challenges during the day; to have other people speaking to us and we to them, to go places with other people, to eat together with others and so on. This is true for small children too. Well-rested and prime children are much more able to engage in playing, and it is easier for them to have a clear sense of their own physical capability when they feel well in their own body; to be able to run, climb and be together with others playing and so on. The child is also more active during the morning than during the afternoon, so when we send our children off to a day of many social challenges and experiences, it is vital to send them off rested and well.

It is also a lot easier to eat for a well-rested child. If you have to wake up children in the morning, it is mostly because they have not had enough sleep and is in need of more. With children who are very tired, at least half an hour may pass before they are even able to eat. Children who wake up by themselves after a good night's sleep are often able to eat right away. As a guideline, if a parent needs to wake up their child in the morning, they will probably need to tuck them into bed earlier in the evening.

Lack of sleep is often the result of an unstable rhythm that can be stabilised. To be able to work efficiently towards resetting a good sleeping rhythm requires of course that the adults see that lack of sleep may be the root of the problem. This is important to mention here, because a child who lacks sleep can develop symptoms that resemble those in children with autism or ADHD, which can point both parents and pedagogues in the wrong direction. A child that lacks sleep



can have trouble listening. They can become aggressive and guick-tempered. Older children may have a hard time expressing themselves, not being able to explain what is wrong. They can become inward and withdrawn or be troubled and sad. The reason I mention this is that it is important for you as the parent to consider if lack of sleep may be one of the reasons why your child is not functioning well. This parameter is sometimes over-looked, as it requires that both parents and pedagogues communicate about the child's sleep at home as well as in the day-care centre.

When considering sleep, it therefore makes sense to include the four other parameters in our thinking: Is there a recognizable rhythm in the child's daily life? Has the child had enough physical exercise? Has mealtime been calm and nourishing? Has there been enough time to look each other in the eye? The quality of sleep depends on our feelings, impressions and general wellbeing during the day. Thus, different essential aspects of life are deeply connected, and it therefore makes sense to study these basic areas of life in order

to become wiser about where we can assist our children with a caring hand.

It is important to remind ourselves that it is wonderful to sleep. It is full of easement, wellbeing and an absolute necessity to lay down and go to sleep. It is important for your child's experience of being tucked-in that you do not feel guilty or worried about it. Your approach and attitude towards sleep has a lot to say in how your child will experience sleep. You can safely start teaching your child to fall asleep by itself, without having to be stimulated, from it is around one years old. Newborns will naturally do so when they are breast-fed or get milk from a bottle. It is not dangerous or lonely to lie by oneself; it is in fact natural for the child to learn to fall asleep on its own. Unconsciously you can transfer your own anxiety and worries or fear of abandonment to your child. Fear is contagious, and the child will always respond to its' parent's feelings. This is a very sensitive issue with lots of opinions, but in my experience, the fear of abandonment is often a misinterpretation where the adult unconsciously projects his

or her own fears upon the child. From my experience, very few children are actually born fearful. Therefore, your child will benefit greatly from your positive thoughts and feelings about falling asleep, also when they are going through a period where it is difficult.

Sleep for the Newborns

A small baby is not born with a sense of a sound sleeping rhythm and it has no sense of day and night. It has hunger, and it has sleep. These two elements make up the child's rhythm. As the adult, you must understand that you need to teach the child to get a good sleeping rhythm. At the same time, you must be very careful to observe the child, because each child is unique and individual.

However, some things do apply in general: Newborns are only awake 30-45 minutes at a time, and then sleep for perhaps 1-3 hours. Then they wake up to feed and go back to sleep again. This first period is very irregular and extremely individual. Some children sleep for a long time in one go between breastfeeding whilst others sleep in smaller stretches

at a time. Some children easily wake up if there is any noise or activity around them, whilst others can sleep through thunder and lightning. This makes it very difficult to give any general advice about sleep. The rhythm of the mother also differs and can be very individual too. Some women are exhausted and strained after giving birth, whilst others have had an easier delivery. For some it is very taxing to wake up many times during the night getting very little sleep, whilst others seem less affected by it. Naturallv. the state and wellbeing of our child also has an effect on us. It is a lot more demanding if your child cries and wakes up a lot than if the child is very calm and sleeps deeply and undisturbed for longer stretches at a time.

The relation between mother and child is essential, and the way the rest of the family acts in support of this is crucial. One could say that if the mother is well, the rest of the family is well too. The father may therefore look to support the mother's emotional and practical needs. Everything must adjust to the new family situation and the father must focus his attention on how to best facilitate the needs of the mother and the newborn child. This is also important in relation to sleeping patterns. The adults need to be aware of the roles they take on in this new family unit, where everything revolves around establishing a good rhythm in the child's life, and the family's new life together.

It is wise for parents to a newborn child to be very attentive to the fact that they as adults play an essential part in setting the framework for the new family unit. You may for example ask yourself if you as a mother have a need of socializing with other adults often, or if you are perfectly fine just being on your own. How you spend your time during the day is also part of creating a good sleeping pattern for your child. Perhaps you experience that the sleeping rhythm of your small

child gets out of joint after a long maternity visit or if you yourself have been out somewhere for a longer period of time stretching through both meals and sleep. Some children are more easily disturbed than others are, but in general, it is safe to say that the new rhythm that needs establishing between mother and child is fragile in the beginning and easily disturbed, especially if life is very unpredictable.

To Practice Rhythm with Newborns

You can establish a very simple rhythm for newborns by planning their sleep in connection with breast or bottle-feeding. Preparing for bedtime already begins with the meal, and this will be the case for a number of years. Newborns will often fall asleep whilst they are being breastfed, so it is advisable to change diaper before the meal, introducing the following rhythm:

- 1. Change of diaper
- 2. Meal
- 3. Tuck in the child

A Beginning Rhythm from the Age of Three Months

You could say that the first three months revolves around allowing your child to get used to being an 'earthling'. The child will gradually begin to be awake for longer periods at a time, and their sleep will begin to get more nuanced and last longer after the first three months. It is a slow and gentle acclimatization process especially between mother and child, where just being together and getting to know each other is of the utmost importance.

When the baby is around three months old, you may want to start introducing a visible difference between night and day when you breast or bottle feed, and slowly begin to develop a rhythm between sleep hours and awake hours. Of course, there are individual differences, for example whether the child is born at term or prematurely or other circumstances. Regardless

of these - and the child's uniqueness of course - it is highly recommended that the adults begin to establish a clear difference between day and night, both for the sake of the adults themselves.

During the night, you might want to avoid turning on electric light and may just light a candle or avoid light completely. This way, you prevent the child's hormones from mistaking it for daytime, when it is in fact in the middle of the night. It also has an influence on the baby's alertness whilst it is being breast-fed, and it will go back into a deeper sleep after feeding when it is dark.

It can be very hard for a new mother to deny her child something especially when it comes to basic needs such as food. However, after three months, most children have put on sufficient weight for you to start teaching them gently that the time between meals will now be longer, and that perhaps 2-4 hours may pass. You can begin by not just instinctively move into nursing position as soon as your baby makes a sound. Try out other possibilities first and wait a little. Again, it is very individual, because some children have a voracious appetite and will cry a lot, because they are actually hungry, whilst others may need less, but will cry anyway because they have gotten used to being breastfed every time they express a need.

As mentioned before, it is very difficult to advise and give specific counsel about this age. because the needs of different children are very individual and can vary a lot. You therefore have to be very sensitive to the needs of your own child as a first principle. It can also be quite difficult for the mother to come up with something else to do other than just breastfeeding, as she is most likely very tired herself too. Here the father or your partner might be able to step in and relieve the mother. It can also be other fami-



ly members if that is a possibility. However, the father might not be available because he is at work during the day, and it can be hard for others to help. Many parents to newborns experience that it is very difficult for others to comfort the child, because the child instinctively feels most safe with its own mother. It is also a very crucial stage in life where mother and child connects with one another at a very deep level.

A More Clear Rhythm from the Age of 3-6 Months

In the ages from 3-6 months, a lot happens physically; the child begins to turn its attention to the world. It starts to turn its' head to reach out for things. The curiosity and willingness in the child to connect with the world causes it to be awake for longer periods at a time. As soon as the baby reaches 4-6 months, we see that it begins to have an early nap in the morning and then another small nap a bit later followed by a longer sleep in the afternoon.

Here you can benefit a lot from establishing a bedtime rhythm where you tuck in the child around seven to eight pm for the night. If you do that the child will normally only wake up shortly lat-

er in the evening to feed. Already now, there is a natural difference between the naps during the day and the long sleeping hours at night. It is very important that both parents pay strict attention to establishing this difference between the naps during the day and the sleep in the night; that both the quality and length of the sleep is different.

The Child at Half a Year of Age

When the baby is about six months old, the visible physical development sets in for real: Every day brings new skills that are visible to the eye. It is an amazing process to witness, wonderful and very life affirming. By six months of age, the child is more accustomed to life, and you begin to see a steadier and clearer rhythm in their sleeping pattern. The morning rhythm might typically look like this:

- A morning nap around 9-10 am
- Lunch at 11 am
- A longer nap around 12 noon

The two naps during the day each have their own quality; the early morning nap is usually a pure vitalization for the child. When it wakes up, it is bouncing

with energy. It is very active in its curiosity and seeks intimacy and close contact. By 6 months of age, the majority of children will also eat food aside from breast milk or formula, and you can probably observe how this "earthly food" causes the child to sleep both deeper and longer. The child also begins to be able to move more; it may roll over from side to side, and it can move forward on the stomach.

The musculoskeletal system and muscle development is so intensive that the child gets exhausted from moving; wriggling, practicing vocals, moving about on the stomach, beginning to crawl, etc. The child simply gets more tired physically. In many ways, it is a revolution at micro level and it requires large amounts of energy.

At this ages nocturnal sleep begins to stretch over a longer sequence; the baby sleeps more before it wakes up to eat and only wakes one or two times during the night and then again around six to seven am in the morning. You now gradually need to wean your child off feeding during the night, and this can be quite difficult for you as parents, because you will naturally feel

obliged to give your child its' food out of care. However whereas before it was vital for your child to get this food during the night, this is no longer the case; instead it might mean interrupted sleep for both you and your child. The longer the child feeds during the night, the more it will develop the habit of waking up during the night, and this can start a downward spiral where the child becomes less hunary at dinnertime. It is important to be aware of the connection between things and for example to see that what you feed your child in the morning needs to be good nutrition that matches the amount of energy the child needs to spend during the day. Porridge is both nutritious, easy to prepare and easy for the child to eat. The nutritional content of evening supper is equally important, as it needs to last for many hours and secure a good night's sleep..

The One To Two Year-Old Child

Small children are in a constant development process and need lots of sleep. From experience, I would say that a one year-old child needs 12 hours of sleep in one stretch from say 7pm to 7am and a 2-4 hour nap during the day.

The child undergoes a continual process of change at many levels, and as the child develops, its' needs change too. Where food is concerned, I highly recommend weaning the child off breast milk and only giving it real food from the age of one. This also means no milk or other liquids during the night. In my professional opinion, giving the child a bottle for the night is an unfortunate habit, and the same goes for the use of dummies. What was good and vital and stimulating to the suckling reflexes, when the baby needed its nutrition, can now turn into a bad habit; and you need to make the decision to take it away. It is only natural for the suckling reflexes to disappear, when something else has replaced it and there is no need for them anymore. It corresponds with the

development of teeth to chew with and language to practice.

The position of the tongue develops with language development, and excessive use of dummies may keep the tongue up in the roof of the mouth behind the front teeth for too long. The dummy can also easily become a kind of "quick fix" solution; because it seems to be the only thing that can stop your child crying if it has hurt itself or become frightened by something. You will probably agree it is good for children to learn to receive care without us having to stuff something in their mouth to make them feel safe. As parents, you can benefit a lot from practicing caring for your child in more age-appropriate ways than using dummies and bottles to comfort your child, if it is tired or sad. We all know that habits can be very hard to get rid of, and I see some children continuing this habit of wanting to put something in their mouth for years, when in fact what they need is care, sleep or comfort.

The 1-year-old child now only needs one nap, which means that the early morning nap falls away, and the child only sleeps after lunch, which they have around 11-11:30 am. This is a big change for the child, but also in the daily rhythm of the family. For some this transition is almost painless. Others may find it a difficult period where the child is very tired and cries a lot. This is completely natural, and it is important to have a high degree of empathy with your child, whilst at the same time sticking to your decision to give up one of the naps, the moment you experience that this extra nap has an unfortunate influence on the daily rhythm.

If you stay at home with your child, you will oftentimes be very tired yourself too, and for some people it can be quite difficult to let go of the break in the morning, now replaced by a small bouncy child. However, it also gives you more awake-time together, and all the many won-

derful small developments that happen right in front of your very eyes also bring a lot of joy, wonder and love into the home.

The child has already for about half a year been able to move away from its' mother, first on the stomach and then by crawling. The one-year-old child begins to be upright and can now walk away from its' parents. Becoming an upright human being is a very significant change, and whilst there is great excitement about reaching this milestone, it does require a lot of energy on the child's part to master this. The long afternoon nap is therefore necessary; and the child may well need 2-4 hours' sleep.

The Necessary Break

Based on my extensive experience with children in this age group a break around midday is essential. Some people have a tendency to skip the afternoon sleep if the child is very difficult to tuck in; they conclude that perhaps the child does not need to rest then. However, I would like to stress that modern children become exposed to so many impressions, that the afternoon nap is actually vital. If the child is not able to fall asleep, it might be wiser to look at their general wellbeing during the last couple of days and specifically the last 24 hours. Has the child had enough physical exercise? Has it had proper nutritious food? Has there been the necessary contact between you? Did it take nap in the morning? There are a number of reasons, why your child is occasionally difficult to tuck in, but it does not make their nap less necessary. If you feel, you have done everything you could think of and more, I have included a small paragraph at the end of this chapter that you might find helpful.

The entire 24-hour sleep pattern is closely connected; if you can get the afternoon sleep to work well, it will most likely have a positive effect on nighttime sleep too. What the child learns during its'

daytime nap, is to be able to settle to fall asleep by itself and surrender. From my experience, many children struggle with this. This makes it even more important to train this during the afternoon nap, because my experience says it will make sleep onset easier at night. If on the other hand you skip the daytime nap, it can make it even more difficult to tuck in the child for the night. It can be hard to implement a good pattern, especially if you are exhausted yourself and do not have the energy to 'fight' with your child to get it to sleep. You might also feel that it is wrong to force your child if it does not want to. My advice is to remember that it is you who are the adults, and it is you who have to step in and take full responsibility for the child's sleep because the child cannot do so itself.

Sleep Rituals

From the child was 8-9 months old you have most likely begun introducing another tucking-in ritual, as the child grows to be more awake and doesn't fall asleep right after the meal anymore. Your tucking-in ritual might look like this:

- Mealtime
- Potty time/change of diaper
- Tucking-in time

The sleep ritual can be quite lovely and magic and it gives a great opportunity for loving and close-in contact. You might sing a little song whilst changing the diaper and another song as you tuck in the child, and the connection and love between you gives the child an emotional satisfaction and settlement that allows it to surrender trustfully to sleep. You can sing the same song repeatedly. The child loves the recognition, which provides great settlement and a feeling that all is well and safe. It is okay to do it effectively, but do it in a calm speed. This will often happen naturally anyway, because your child will be very tired. Perhaps you will recognize that it is not advisable to let the child play for too long after the meal, because



there is a risk that it might cause it to speed up and become more awake. Perhaps you have tried to tuck in an overtired child and experienced how much they can cry when you lay them down to rest.

Own Bed

It is very important that your child can sleep in the same place every night, because recognisability allows the child to feel safe and able to sleep. The child can easily have its' daytime nap in the same pram or crib outside; the main thing is that it is done the same way every day.

It is important that the child go to sleep in its own bed where it learns to settle and fall asleep by itself in the evening. Many children end up in their parent's bed during the night, which is understandable as long as they are being breastfed, but it is still advisable to lay the child in its own bed, when you tuck it in for the night to allow it to get used to be in its' own bed.

What would be a fitting bed then? A bed needs to fit the size of the child. It should not be too large, and it should have boards around the sides; it is fine if the child can touch the bedhead. In other words, the child needs to be able to register the bedframe, because this allows it to feel safe. You will often find that the toddler will end up in a corner of the bed because they need to feel the frame around them. Therefore, it can be

difficult for a very small human being to settle and fall asleep in a large double bed, simply because the frame is missing. If it is the only option for a period, you can create some temporary walls around the place in the bed where your small child sleeps with some pillows or quilts, preferably placed in the same way every night so that it is recognizable.

You might also put a canopy over the bed to give the child a ceiling to look at, without it being claustrophobic of course. All this can help making the child feel safe: after all, it has been in the womb for 9 months and has just arrived in this very big and to the child completely unpredictable world. Therefore, it is important that parents shield their child in the beginning, and only little by little and introduce the child to the big world in its' own speed. There is no rush. They will surely get out there before we know it.

Lovely Sleep Rituals in the Ages from One to Seven

A recognizable rhythm will help your child settle. It is both very soothing and calming, but also very assisting to the tucking-in process, if you establish some good rituals around it. As parents, you will find your own rituals; you might choose songs you had sung to you when you were a child. Perhaps you will read some of the same bedtime stories at night or give the child a bath in the evening, or other rituals of care that fit with your family rhythm. It is your noble task to create your own rituals, the important point being that vour child will be able to recognize and feel safe with the rhythm and rituals you create.

As mentioned previously, sleep begins with the meal. After meal-time, the child might sit and play for about half an hour. It can be good to do the dishes right away, as the small child loves to listen to the grown-ups going about their business, whilst the child comes, goes, and plays nearby. The daytime rhythm can be

repeated successfully in the evening when the child needs to go to sleep; children from approximately 4-5 years of age stay up a little longer after supper, but not more than 1 hour. After tidying up and playing it's fine to go to the bathroom and begin the evening rituals you have choose besides going to the toilet or potty, washing oneself slightly and brushing teeth. Some bathe their child every night, whilst others do not. Some comb their hair every night and so on. Again, the point being that you as parents focus on establishing a safe and recognizable rhythm. After bathroom rituals, you might want to tell the child it is time to ao to bed.

If the child does not have a room of its own, you can create a little sleeping corner for the child. Perhaps you can put up a little angel or another mobile in the ceiling, and you can place a chair by the child's bed. You might want to put a little table there with a candle and a special book that you read from with the child sitting on your lap. It does not matter if you turn over the same pages repeatedly in the same book. You can easily use the same book for a whole year. Many books invite too many choices at a time when the child needs to quieten and slow down. For the same reason you do not want to read for too long because the main principle is to create a safe and calm atmosphere that brings the necessary settlement, allowing the child to fall asleep. Overall, the whole process should not take more 20 minutes.

After the bedtime story, you can put your child to bed and perhaps sing a little song. It might be nice if you hold their hand for a bit and speak lovingly and reassuringly to them, or you can just sit quietly together. When you feel ready, and the child seems to have settled to it, you can blow out the candle, kiss the little one goodnight and leave the room. It is most effective



when you as the adult has faith in the child's ability to manage on its own and radiate this trust in them from the belief that this is the right thing to do.

Some children fall asleep right away, because they are so tired. Others may twist and turn for some time. It is quite natural that there may be a difference in how children fall asleep and go through different phases where it is more or less difficult for them to fall asleep. The important thing is that you keep acting the same and keep trusting that your child is perfectly capable falling asleep by itself. If the child cries, you listen to what kind of crying it is; try for example to count to 50 before you do anything to see if it is just the child's way of expressing itself where you don't need to follow up on it. Very strong willed children might have a need to express themselves very loudly; it does not necessarily mean they are feeling unsafe. The main thing is that you feel confident that your child is able to fall asleep, and that it is good for the child to be by itself.

You may leave the door ajar so the child can fall asleep to the sounds of home; there is no reason that home should be silent as a grave. It could have the unfortunate side effect that you parents begin to tiptoe around and not talk, so the child becomes so accustomed to the silence that it wakes up at the slightest sound when in the process of dozing off. Of course, it is always good to be considerate and not listen to loud music for example or start vacuuming or making a lot of noise.

Rhythm outside ' Everyday Life

I would advise that you follow the sleep rhythm every single day, also on Saturdays and Sundays and during holidays. During summertime, you might choose to add another hour; in Scandinavia, we have many light hours in the summer, whilst it is very dark during winter, and perhaps the family has another rhythm during holidays too. However, do try to follow the rituals as best as you can, because it helps your child a lot. It can be difficult for a child to sleep in a new place, but if you stick to the rituals with the well-known blanket and the well-known doll from home, it can be a great help in making your child feel safe enough to fall asleep. On the other hand, if you break the rhythm it can cost you a whole week of disharmony and trouble. Perhaps you have tried yourself to break the rhythm and experienced how far-reaching the consequences can be.

"But we are doing everything we can!"

It may well be that you experience having a hard time getting your child to sleep even though you feel you are doing everything you can think of and have covered all their basic needs. My advice to you is to just keep trying and remember that childhood is one long process of development with many different phases. The difficulties you are going through right now will surely pass too. Perhaps the child just needs to settle to a new phase, where many things are happening at a tremendous speed, and perhaps

it is just this ferocious speed and power with which it is developing that causes anxiety in the child when it needs to sleep.

This is therefore also a question about what you will and will not compromise. If the dummy is the only thing that seems to work, but it wakes the child up five times every night because it falls out, will you then stick with the dummy or try to wean the child off it? A strong-willed child may protest greatly if the breast or dummy stops, and it can cause much weeping and frustration. My experience tells me that it is hard to see it through and it requires that you really believe in it. However, it you stick with it, it will certainly bear fruit in the end. This of course is very difficult to remember when you stand in the middle of it, and perhaps are in lack of sleep too. Remember though, if you wean your child off the things you feel are becoming a bad habit, you can be so proud of yourself once it is over. Hopefully you can look back at all your struggles and think to yourself: "Boy, that was hard, but we got through it!" comforted by the fact that you have not mistreated your child; on the contrary, you have helped it greatly by weaning it off something that was not no longer useful to it.

Your own sleep

As mentioned in the beginning of this article sleep is vital to our wellbeing regardless of whether we are adults or children. It is demanding to have energetic small children when not well rested yourself. You probably know this already. You are a much better parent when you get enough sleep. You become less irritable and are better able to maintain an overview. I therefore want to emphasize that you need to take care of your own biological need for sleep too. For some time you may have to accept, that you cannot stay up late, even though you feel you need this adult time. As a parent, you are on duty all the time and I know of no parents who do well with

less than 8-9 hours of sleep. If possible, I recommend that you find time to rest during the day whilst your child has its afternoon nap. Plug out the phone and let the world take care of itself. It will not go anywhere and it is good to take timeout just for a few hours.

Instead of feeling pulled to do the laundry, the dishes and tidy up all whilst the baby is sleeping, think that it can wait until you have both rested. It is good for the child to see and feel vour care for the home and it can be great to do the laundry together with an eager little one who wants to help, or perhaps just wants to play nearby whilst you take care of the household chores. It is after all necessary work that needs doing no matter what, and it might be healthy and wise to get rid of the notion that it is something that just needs to be finished as fast as possible. What many of us seem to forget is that there is a treasure trove of pleasant moments between you and your little one locked up inside the daily household chores, and that the child actually gets to know life through these daily chores.

Helle Heckmann has written the book *The Five Golden Keys* with advise for parent and teachers. www.slowparenting.dk

