

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

HELP WITH BEDTIME PROBLEMS

By Ruby M. Johnston

About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

Ruby M. Johnston

President, International Leadership and Development Center

Co-Founder, LAMb International

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Help With Bedtime Problems

Most parents experience some bedtime problems with their children from time to time. Children can stall bedtime by using one excuse after another for your attention: a drink of water, need to use the toilet again, want another hug, ask for a story, on and on. You might put your child into bed and time after time they come out to ask a question. This can easily become one of the most frustrating times of the day for the parent. Bedtime problems can occur at any age, but are most prevalent between 3 and 6 years of age¹.

Although you cannot “make” your child go to sleep, you can help your child improve bedtime behavior. The management of bedtime problems is best geared toward establishing simple routine in which the child becomes comfortable and the bedtime becomes predictable for him. This routine is clearly different from daytime activities, play time or nap time. Effectiveness is more likely to result if the parent is consistent in this routine.

If you are experiencing difficulty now, it is likely your child has become comfortable with this behavior. Changing behavior might be difficult so being persistent and consistent might even be a painful experience for you personally. However, helping a child achieve calm and routine bedtime behavior is well worth the personal investment.

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- Some reasons children do not want to go to bed.
- Hints to create a bedtime routine.
- What else might be of concern?

¹ 2008 – Kidzzsleep, Providence, RI: www.kdzzsleep.org



SOME REASONS CHILDREN DO NOT WANT TO GO TO BED

Difficult transitions

“Wow that was a fun time wrestling,” says father. Mother then walks in and says, “It is bedtime.” This is not likely to be an easy transition for the child. When children are involved in games or activities that require a lot of energy or evoke excitement, it is difficult for them to move from high energy to restful sleep. Putting energy evoking activity earlier in the evening and a quieter activity just before bedtime, just might help in a better transition for bedtime.

Emotional stress

Yes, children experience emotional stress. If something is concerning them or if they feel unloved, unsafe or fearful, they might resist bedtime. Even adults find sleep difficult if they have a lot of things on their mind. Sometimes children have things on their mind and need a way of resolving questions and concerns.

Playing games – getting control

It just might be a game for the child to win. It does not take a child very long to discover the parents breaking point and the parents tolerance levels.

Too much of the wrong food before bedtime

Research has shown over and over again that some foods are a hindrance to sleep. What your child eats does make an impact on his sleep. Pay close attention to how different foods impact his energy level and choose bedtime snacks that do not cause an energy burst for him.

Scary dreams

Children have dreams. If your child is having bad dreams, he might resist going to bed. Going to bed reminds him of the “bad” things in his sleep. Consider the reasons for this. Might you be allowing movies or books into your child's life that are frightening? If so, these might be impacting his restful sleep and dreams.



TIPS FOR CREATING A BEDTIME ROUTINE

Creating routine takes time. Just like changing our own behavior, it takes repeating the behavior over and over again until it becomes habit. Habits are comfortable. Remember, we said earlier that if your child is giving you bedtime challenges, it just might be the most comfortable behavior for him...it is his present habit. This is what we want to change, the present habit to a new habit of routine.

Of course you must first decide on what time you want to have your child tucked into bed. Experts recommend that infants (three to 11 months) get 14 to 15 hours of sleep per night, while toddlers get 12 to 14 hours, pre-schoolers 11 to 13 hours and school-age children 10 to 11 hours.

A child who gets enough sleep and sleeps well is more likely to be cheerful during the day. The better the child sleeps, the happier the entire family will be. Deciding on bedtime then depends upon the child and the routine of the home.

What are weekend times, weekday times? All this will depend on the age of each individual child. From this you can decide upon a routine.

Here are some tips to help in creating a great routine:

- 1. Explain the new rules.** Have a short and simple conversation with your child about the new rules for bedtime. Make this a positive conversation, letting your child know this is going to make everyone in the family happy. It will be fun to have a good bedtime routine.
- 2. Set the bedtimes for each child.** This might be the first place you will find resistance. You need to know and understand each child to do this. Factors which need considered are complex; child's own internal clock, your personal needs, wake-up time, age of child, child's school responsibilities, etc. Once you set the time – be firm and consistent.
- 3. Learn the art of transitioning.** Start bedtime routine well before bed. This does not need to involve the child directly. This can be the parent “turning down” the environment. Soften the sounds of radio, television or music. Soften the lights, read a story, or engage in some quiet favorite activity with your child. Younger children might enjoy rocking, sitting in the bath for a time, etc.
- 4. Be firm and kind.** Put your child to bed, complete night time routine and walk out of the room when your child is awake, as you want him to learn to fall asleep on his own. If your child cries or yells, remind him it is bedtime. You might need to check on him frequently and remind him, but do not make this a play time...be firm, reminding him he cannot get up as it is bedtime. Don't make this an interesting time – be BORING! These checks should be quick enough to reassure your child, but give the clear message it is time to go to sleep.

- 5. Return child to bed immediately if he comes out of his room.** Again, be firm and kind, but remind him that he must stay in his room and go to sleep. Do not lock your child in his room, although you might want to close his door for a few minutes and remind him you will open the door as soon as he is back in bed.
- 6. Reward your child for a good night routine.** When your child has accomplished a good routine for bedtime, reward him in the morning. Dwelling on misbehavior is negative and is hurtful to children. It is better to be clear about what behavior is appropriate and that this is pleasing to you. Give your child attention for his successes.
- 7. Engage your older child in an agreement about bedtime.** School age children are able to discuss bedtimes and set an agreeable time. When children are engaged in making decisions, they are often more cooperative in bedtime routines.
- 8. Remember children are all different.** Each child's need for sleep is different from age to age and even day to day. When your child says he is not sleepy, this might be true. However, stick to routines you have set for the child. Children will learn bedtime routine only if the rules are enforced.

For older children, you might suggest it is okay for them to read or write for a short time before they are to turn their lights out. Of course the other benefit here is that this could improve their reading and writing skills and it helps the child learn that being alone is okay.



WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE OF CONCERN?

Other common concerns can surface when bedtimes are difficult for the child. It is important for each parent to know their child well. Asking some key questions might help in sorting out what is common bedtime resistance to what might be a problem that needs the attention of a doctor, or a therapist. Things to question:

- Child is waking up frequently throughout the night.
- Your relationship is beginning to suffer as a result of the struggle with bedtimes.
- Your child is unable to fall back to sleep once they awake during the night.
- Your older child frequently wakes up and wants to eat something.

Getting a child to go to bed is a common problem that many parents experience and the problem can surface at any age. However most problems are between 3 and 6 years of age and are manageable with consistency and routine. But if the struggle for bedtime routine is becoming more than you as a parent can manage, it is time to seek help from a professional.



FINAL STEP

Bedtime can be hard because both children and parents are tired. Children need their sleep to be able to learn, grow and further develop. Parents need both quiet time before bed and their own sleep in order to function well as a parent.

Routine is the most helpful tool in the process of a satisfying bedtime experience. And routine can help everyone. Remember and practice these final steps:

Step 1: For all children, praise them when they cooperate at bedtime.

Step 2: Hug your children. Let them know you appreciate how they are respecting the rules of the house.

Step 3: Thank your children for giving you some time alone in the evening to rest before you go to bed.

Step 4: Congratulate yourself for being patient, loving and kind to your children and to yourself in these difficult times as a parent!

Final Step: Write out your plan for bedtime routines – one plan for each child.

Child 1:

This child likes the following before bedtime:

Child 2:

This child likes the following before bedtime:

Child 3:

This child likes the following before bedtime:

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aid – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family

36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child
39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child
 - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE