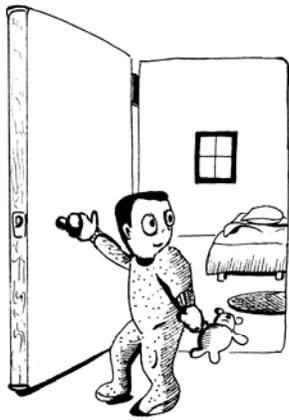


# *Getting Young Children To Go To Bed*



A problem that many parents experience is difficulty in getting their children to go to bed. Some children refuse to go to bed, while others go to bed but take long periods of time to fall asleep. If these problems become chronic, it can be very frustrating for parents. The following program has proven to be effective for families with these problems.

**\*Select a temporary bedtime based on when your child is naturally falling asleep.** For instance, if you put your child to bed at 8:00 p.m., but your child is not falling asleep until 9:30 p.m., move the bedtime temporarily to 9:30 p.m.

**\*Develop a bedtime routine that takes approximately 20 minutes to complete.** The routine should involve four to seven activities that are not physically stimulating (e.g. no rough play). These activities could include such things as a light snack, a bath, a story, a good night hug, etc. Your interactions with your child during these activities should be very positive.

**\*Start the routine approximately 20 minutes before the temporary bedtime.** Follow the routine every night with activities in exactly the same order. Consistency is critical.

**\*When the bedtime routine is completed, put your child to bed and leave the bedroom.** It is very important that your child be awake when put to bed. Your child must learn to fall asleep by himself or herself.

**\*Ignore your child's crying and/or protesting when he or she is being put to bed.** After five minutes, you may go into the bedroom briefly (for one minute) to check on your child. You should gradually increase the amount of time before going into your child's room each night. For example, wait five minutes the first night, ten minutes the second night, and fifteen minutes the third night.

The purpose of going back into the bedroom is not to comfort your child until the fussing stops. The purpose is to ensure yourself that your child is ok (upset yes, but ok) and to let your child know that you haven't forgotten about him or her.

**\*If your child comes out of his or her bedroom, he or she should be placed back in bed with little physical contact and told to stay in bed.** If your child repeatedly comes out of the bedroom, you should consider locking the door. The goal is to help your child learn to fall asleep by himself or herself. Closing the door is a way of enforcing this rather than to punish or scare your child. If you truly believe that your child is very frightened, you can offer reassurance by talking to him through the closed door. Do not threaten or scream.

**\*Monitor behavior.** You should start to see major improvements within the first couple of weeks of following the program.

**\*Changing bedtime.** After seeing consistent improvements at the temporary bedtime, the next step is to start moving the bedtime back to the original time. Each week, the bedtime routine is begun ten to

fifteen minutes earlier until the original bedtime is reached. If you move the bedtime back too quickly, you will likely have problems.

**\*During the initial weeks of the program, it is important to reinforce improvements.** In the morning, your child should be praised and rewarded (e.g. allow child to choose between two favored foods for breakfast) if he or she stayed in bed. Do not lecture your child if the bedtime did not go well. Focus only on improvements.



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