



Six Strategies for Making Bedtime Easier

Bedtime is difficult for virtually every child at some point. Children can get upset, protest, or create distractions (e.g. wanting to use the restroom *again*). A routine that is positive and consistent can make bedtime more pleasant and less stressful for everyone.

1. Be Consistent – Keep a consistent bedtime and bedtime routine. When children know bedtime is at 8:00 every night they are not caught off guard when their activities are interrupted. By sticking to a routine even on weekends you avoid nightly discussions about the time or requests to stay up a little later.

2. Plan - Plan ahead for bedtime. If you know it takes your son or daughter 30 minutes to get into their pajamas, brush their teeth, and read three bedtime stories, always start the routine at 7:30 for an 8:00 bedtime. If children use a visual schedule include all of the activities leading up to bedtime in the schedule. Some children also need a reminder before they start their bedtime routine. Setting an alarm and saying, 'You have five minutes before it is time to brush your teeth,' is a way to prepare children and it creates a system that depends on the alarm not just you returning in five minutes and saying, 'Time to go brush your teeth.' Reading stories about a bedtime routine also can be helpful for reviewing expectations.

3. Make Bedtime Something To Look Forward To – Change bedtime from a time to dread into an enjoyable part of the day. Create a routine that includes quiet and enjoyable activities and use this as a time to devote your attention fully to your son or daughter. Reading to children is wonderful for their education and is a great way to relax. Other activities children can look forward to at bedtime are turning on a fun nightlight, singing a few songs together, or getting to snuggle in bed with their favorite stuffed animal. As with bedtime, make these activities consistent rituals in your evening. By making parts of bedtime unique and special, this time can become an enjoyable part of both your child's day and your day.

4. Be Positive – Children gather information from our tone and how we react to situations. Although you may have had a long day and are frustrated, keep an overall positive tone and attitude to keep overall stress down.

5. Follow Through – An 8:00 bedtime means 8:00. Although activities sometimes run late and parents have things that distract them, planning in advance to be home and ready for bed ensures children have consistency and know what is expected of them. Changing times, routines, and expectations can lead to unnecessary stress for children who depend on routines. Setting a schedule and enforcing it may be difficult at first, but following through with the set bedtime and routine is essential for success.

6. Recognize Bedtime Benefits Everyone – Everyone benefits from a consistent and positive bedtime routine! Research about the benefits of a consistent sleep schedule for children is plentiful, but a sleep routine benefits all family members. When children follow a bedtime routine without protest it is less stressful for parents and children. When children are in bed at a reasonable time, parents can relax or get things done before they go to bed.

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