Managing My Child's Behaviour

Getting My Child Into Bed for the Night
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Imagine it’s 8:00pm. Without a word, your child picks up his or her belongings and, after a kiss and hug goodnight, quickly scoots off to bed. Sound impossible?

This booklet will look at bedtimes and how to get your child into bed on time just as the scenario suggests.

Why is bedtime so important?

What happens at bedtime can impact the quality of sleep a child has. Not enough sleep or poor quality sleep can lead to problem behaviors during the day. With children, if they don’t get enough sleep they can become irritable, grouchy, moody, and defiant – just like adults. Children who sleep well and long enough are more apt to cope with day-to-day events better – again, just like adults.

What is also important is that adults need adult time in order to recharge their batteries.
Determining What Time is Bedtime

The average child needs about ten hours of sleep per night. Some children need more and some need less.

Ten hours is a good starting point. If your child gets up at 6:00am then set bedtime at 8:00pm. If your child struggles to get up then he or she may need more than 10 hours. Let’s use 8:00pm as our selected bedtime.

Bedtime routine starts early

If bedtime is 8:00pm then bedtime routine starts at 7:30. This is when all the drinks, snacks, bathroom breaks, and questions occur. Let the child know that all of these items must be done by 8:00 (even if the child has earned a later bedtime).

This is a time when the house should be quieter, slower, and activities are relaxing rather than energetic.

This routine should be the same every night. Consistency creates good habits.
Earning Later Bedtime

If the regular bedtime selected is 8:00pm then the child has the opportunity to earn up to 8:30 as a later bedtime. Let the child know that he or she can earn up to 8:30 if the following criteria are met:
1. They got up in the morning without issue
2. They are pleasant during the day
3. They are ready for bed by 8:00pm (bedtime routine is done)
If they have met these three criteria then they have earned a later bedtime.

Encourage and Reward Self Reliance

Most children want a later bedtime. Let your child know that his or her bedtime can be negotiated once they are consistently going to bed on time and without incident. Remind them that it is their job to keep an eye on the clock and get themselves into bed. Tell them that those are the things you’ll be looking for when negotiating a later bedtime.
Regular bedtimes can be renegotiated every four to six months. Anytime the child shows you that he is tired during the day without reason then his or her bedtime is too late.

What About Weekends

Weekends shouldn’t be a free for all at bedtime. At most, add only one hour to the bedtime. More than one hour is hard on their systems and serves no purpose. Bedtime routines and expectations should remain the same on weekends.
Extra Bedtime Tips

Here are some extra tips to help with bedtime:

1. Once the child is in bed the expectation is that he or she stays in bed. Allowing the child to get up and have “a few extra minutes” only encourages the child to want to get up again.

2. If the child says they are not tired then the expectation is that they can read quietly in their rooms until they fall asleep. “I’m not tired” doesn’t mean get out of bed.

3. Watch what your child is snacking on before bed. Caffeine can impact the quantity and quality of sleep.

4. Kids with overactive imaginations may need soft music or the radio playing to help them fall asleep – make sure the volume is low so they have to strain to listen.

5. Make sure you throw in extra rewards where possible for good bedtime habits. These habits follow them
through to adulthood and are very important for healthy day-to-day functioning.

Bedtime is not a time to bribe kids. You set the expectations that they are to meet – not the other way around. If a child is saying “I’ll go to bed if…” then it’s time to take a closer look at how bedtimes are set up in your home.
In Partnership Together

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