

## Prescription for a Good Night's Sleep

- Allow sufficient wind-down time; plan a good wind-down activity. Extending exciting activities up to the last minute only prolongs the falling-asleep process. Stop exciting activity – rough play, television, computer games, especially those with scary content – well before bedtime. Teenagers shouldn't study up to last minute. Establish a wind-down activity – reading, bath, quiet music.
- Keep it safe. Avoid scary material before bed – for young children, no scary books or videos, no frightening games with chases; for older kids, no scary books or movies before bed – or make at all! They are not necessary!
- Have a plan for nighttime fears. Make up realistic self-talk on cue cards for the child at bedtime, teach diaphragmatic breathing, and keep a flashlight on hand.
- Make sure your child gets sufficient exercise during the day – but not close to bedtime.
- Keep it positive! Avoid all negative associations with sleep or the child's bedroom. Don't use sleep as a punishment (going to bed early for bad behavior). Use another area if "time-outs" are needed so that they are not associated with the child's room. Keep the associations with being alone and being in bed positive.
- Watch the child's diet. Eliminate caffeine- chocolate, teas, sodas (even some root beers and clear or orange sodas contain caffeine). The effects of caffeine, which can exacerbate anxiety, may last up to ten hours after intake.
- Plan for the "ploys". Don't reward nighttime "ploy" behavior. Though nighttime conversations can be golden, if you stay an extra twenty minutes to get the scoop on school, it will likely become a new nighttime ritual. If you want time to catch up with your child, push back bedtime to accommodate or encourage your child to share new with you after supper. If your child always needs a glass of water, have him get one himself and put it beside his bed before he gets in.
- Focus on readiness for sleep, not a deadline. Don't focus on expectations about when your child should fall asleep; he/she can't control that. The harder he/she tries to sleep, the more awake she will be.
- Avoid the problem of getting kids out of your bed: Don't invite them in. Don't make more work for yourself or your child by having him just "visit" in your bed before bedtime; make your room off-limits before bedtime and thus avoid the problem altogether.

- "Don't call us, we'll call you." The rule is that your child stays in bed: You will be the one checking on him; he is not to come find you. You can use incentives: happy-face charts, stickers, or small prizes for your children, and more tangible rewards for older children. Without getting angry, be firm and be clear: Your child needs to stay in bed.
- "Location, location, location." Settle your child down to fall asleep in the same setting (his/her room) where he/she will wake up. For young kids, falling asleep in your room and waking up in the middle of the night in their own room will be disorienting. Teenagers who fall asleep in front of the TV won't be comfortable falling asleep without the TV.
- Make parting less sorrowful – be brief. Be consistent in how long you stay in the room. You'll be supervising the wind-down more with young children (under eight); with older children you will facilitate their independent "settling routine." Stay for shorter and shorter times.
- End with a pleasant interaction. In whatever way fits for your family, send our child to sleep with a message of love-singing, hugs, kisses, a funny saying, or "sweet dreams."
- Reinforce good cooperation with extra hugs, an extra story, and so forth.
- Don't watch the clock! Turn clocks around or take them out of the room. The only thing they do is keep your child up calculating exactly how long he's been up, how much less sleep he's getting, and how tired he'll be tomorrow.
- Keep the room dark or dim (light will clock the production of melatonin and will interfere with the body's natural rhythms of sleep). Fade light gradually over time using lower-wattage bulbs and shifting the source of light from overheads, to night-lights, to night-lights in adjoining rooms or hallways.

### What Time Should Bedtime Be?

Children get a second wind, telling you they are not tired, wiling themselves through those early signs of bedtime readiness, but bedtime needs to be bedtime. While every child is different, these general guidelines will help.

One- to three-year-olds: twelve to fourteen hours, bedtime between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m.

Four- to six-year-olds: ten to twelve hours, bedtime between 7 and 9 p.m.

Seven- to twelve-year-olds: ten to eleven hours, bedtime between 7:30 and 9:30.

Teens: eight and a half to nine hours; if they're in bed by 10 p.m. they are significantly less likely to suffer from depression.