

HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD TO SLEEP IN THEIR OWN BED



Not Being able to sleep in their own bed is one of the most common complaints among parents of anxious children. This is a gradual process that has been highly successful.

Invite your child to plan a game that you could call “making believe you are going to sleep in your bed.” Encourage them to put on a kind of show, tricking an imaginary audience into thinking they are going to sleep in their own bed, although they actually know this is not going to be the case.

- Make sure they actually have a bed to sleep in - fully made and ready as if a child were going to sleep there.
- Have the child go thru the motions of getting ready for bed - washing up, putting on PJs, etc. and then getting into the bed for a predetermined amount of time that the child helps in setting. For many children, this will be only a minute or two. The child should know that once the predetermined time has passed, they can go to their parents' bed without further demand.
- Do not try to encourage the child to stay longer than the agreed upon time, even if the child seems perfectly comfortable in their own bed. Once they have met the time requirement, praise them for completing the task and invite them to the parents' bed.
- After repeating a given length of time for two or three nights, the time can be gradually lengthened in small increments.
- Usually by the time the duration reaches 10 to 15 minutes, children will have fallen asleep in their own bed - in which case the parents leave them there for the rest of the night and celebrate the success in the morning!
- Even after a child has stayed the entire night, the plan continues unaltered the following night and so forth until sleeping in bed has become a consistent occurrence.

The secret to success in this plan lies in the fact that by predefining the amount of time a child will lay in their own bed, a situation is created in which the child is in bed but is not anxious. This is because they know it is only for a limited amount of time. The natural consequence of lying in bed when not particularly anxious...is falling asleep. The anxiety is eliminated and the child forms a new association between being in bed and feelings of calm and relaxation.

If children have both trouble going to sleep and waking up during the night, tackle the bedtime first before trying to get the child to stay in bed when they wake up during the night. If they are unable to go to sleep at bedtime they are probably equally or more unable to stay in bed after waking because they have no experience of falling asleep in bed.

From: Treating Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety, by Eli L. Lebowitz and Haim Omer