

Developing Good Bedtime Routines

The bedtime routine should last about 20-30 minutes, it needs to have a definite end point, something that the child can learn to associate with falling asleep. This could be as simple as turning off the light or saying goodnight to the child. A goodnight phrase can be useful, a phrase that is said every night just as you leave them to settle to sleep, this will be the last thing you say to them every night and is the signal to them that it is now time to settle down to sleep. e.g. "Good night sleep tight see you in the morning"

The bedtime routine can include having a bath, putting on pyjamas, having a drink, brushing teeth, reading a story and saying good night to the rest of the family.

Try to have a fixed time for bedtime that you stick to during the week and at weekends.

Try to ensure that the child can learn that there is a clear difference between day and night, this could be by reducing light in the room, keeping the atmosphere calm and peaceful, also try to show them that you are different at night: that you are quieter and less willing to have a lot of contact or conversation.

If they awaken after having been asleep and start to cry or be upset, go in after 5 minutes and gently but firmly resettle them to sleep with as little touching as possible and repeat your goodnight phrase. Then leave the room.

If they come out of the bedroom take them immediately back to their bed and gently but firmly resettle them to sleep with as little touching as possible and repeat your goodnight phrase. Then leave the room. If they come out again just repeat this approach.

If they won't settle to sleep without you in the room, you can gradually increase your distance between you and them over a period of nights, e.g. lie beside them without cuddles, sit on the bed, stand beside the bed, stand a bit away, stand by the door, stand outside the door etc. until they no longer need you to be there for them to settle to sleep.

Whichever approach you use avoid all further conversation with them, playing and even eye contact! Be boring! Only repeat your goodnight phrase as needed to let them know it is time for sleep.

Consider a reward that will be meaningful for them, this may mean rewarding separate parts of the bedtime routine, e.g. going to the bedroom when asked, staying in bed once settled, staying in bed all night etc. It is important that they:

- Know how to get the reward
- Is rewarded every time they behave as you want them to
- Is rewarded as soon as possible

The actual reward can be worked towards by using star charts or a picture of the reward cut into a simple jigsaw puzzle for which they need to earn all the pieces before getting the reward.