

# The Parent's Corner

we're in your corner

## HEALTHY BEDTIME ROUTINES

If you are struggling with your children at bedtime, you are not alone. Parents often come to counselors with questions or concerns about their child's sleep routines: refusing to go to bed or sleep in his/her own bed, sneaking the iPad or electronic devices late at night, recurrent nightmares/night terrors-- the list goes on. Bedtime can be a daunting feat, especially if you have multiple children of various age ranges to get settled. Here are some **tips on common bedtime-related issues at home:**

### Night Terrors/Nightmares

If your child is experiencing nightmares, this may not be abnormal. Approximately 10-50% of children experience nightmares frightening enough to wake parents, with the average age starting to experience these between 3 and 6 years old. It is important to be able to decipher between nightmares and night terrors. **Nightmares** generally occur during the second half of the night and may wake your child, while **terrors** typically occur during the first half of the night as your child is working his/her way through the sleep cycle and generally are not remembered in the morning. Your child may experience kicking and thrashing, shouting or trying to speak, sleepwalking, sweating, breathing heavily, or be hard to wake/confused when waking up. **Various factors** can attribute to ongoing sleep terrors or nightmares: sleep deprivation, stress, fever/sickness, family history, gender (sleep terrors are more common in females), or a medical concern such as sleep-disordered breathing, anxiety disorders or medication your child may be taking. **Preventative measures** may be to recreate your bedtime routine-- create a relaxing space for your child, ensure your child is well-fed and getting plenty of rest, and keep bedtime activities light, positive and empowering for your child. If you notice your child's episodes as a pattern at a certain time of night, it may be beneficial to create a break in their sleep. However, too many breaks will negatively affect his/her rest levels. It is also important to use **open communication with your child** the next day to determine if there is a theme in nightmares or events leading to them.

### Late Night Electronics

As technology advances, children are receiving iPads, tablets, cell phones, and video games at younger ages. For many kids, these devices remain in their rooms. This may pose a concern at nighttime if your child is continuing to use these devices past bedtime, or "sneaking" them when parents go to sleep. Lack of sleep may result in a multitude of social and physical issues, including poor focus or motivation at school, need to nap during the day, irritability, mood swings, forgetfulness, and even higher rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation in teens. To **combat late-night electronic use, create a curfew** for electronics at night and **keep electronics out of the bedroom** if possible. In younger kids, shy away from using his/her room as a place of punishment when in trouble and instead verbalize that it is a calming location to rest.

### Bedtime/Bed Refusal

Another concern parents bring up often is their child's refusal to go to bed, tantrums at nighttime, or their attempts to break their child of co-sleeping behaviors. Starting from an early age if possible, speak to your child using positive bedtime language, such as, "Big kids get to sleep in their own beds!" rather than, "You are too old to be sleeping with me". If your child is older and struggling to sleep in his/her own bed, you may try slowly easing them out of this by sitting on their bed to fall asleep, then moving to the doorway, then letting them know you'll check in occasionally, and then finally allowing them to sleep in their own space without you. You may also allow them 15 minutes in your bed and then switch to theirs, or "graduate" to a sleeping bag next to your bed, before finally transitioning to their own. Be patient -- the older the child, the more gradual this may be as they have had more years being comforted by co-sleeping. **For both bedtime resistance and bed refusal**, it may be beneficial to implement a **positive reward chart** for your child. If they spent X amount of time in their bed that week, they can receive a reward (an activity with you, extra computer time, or their choice of praise). Try to keep these charts positive and allow your child to add to his/her progress.

**If your child's sleep concerns extend beyond these tips, it may be time to reach out to a therapist or your child's doctor.**