

BEDTIME

Bedtime and children's sleep habits can cause nightmares - for parents, that is!

Bedtime can be a battle in many families as children resist attempts to end their day and allow parents to have some time to themselves.

Often at the end of a long day all you want is a little peace and time for yourself. After all, you have probably devoted the entire day to the service of children in some form.

Whether it is putting bread on the table or being gainfully employed in an unpaid position as housekeeper and cook, you deserve a break.

Come on, kids, be reasonable!

But children do not always see bed-time from a parent's perspective. They often dispute calls for bed and complain loudly that it is too early.

None of the other kids at school go to bed at 8 o'clock, Mum. "It's not fair." is the sort of line that is used in thousands of homes each night.

Others procrastinate with toilet-time, last minute drinks and detailed arrangements of teddies so that bed-time stretches by half an hour before parents realise what is happening.

Some parents are plagued by jack-in-the-boxes who reappear as soon as the bedroom light is turned off while others have night-callers who keep parents busy with comments such as: "I can't get to sleep."

If bed-time presents difficulties in your home try the following ideas at kids' bed-time so that you can maximise the time you have for yourself and your partner.

A clear plan can help make the end of the day less of a chore for parents.

DEVELOP A BEDTIME PLAN

- **Distinguish between being in bed and being in the bedroom.** Children differ in the amount of sleep they need – so to expect them to go to sleep at a certain time is unrealistic. However, they can be expected to be in their bedrooms at a set time and then regulate their own sleep habits.
- **Have a set routine such as 'quiet time, drink and story' which signals the end of the day and stick to it.** Even older primary school children benefit from a set routine that lets them know what is expected so they can plan accordingly.
- **Be firm and resist procrastination.** Try always to say good night at the appointed time even if children are not quite ready.

- **Turn the television off** and, if necessary, remove other distractions such as computers, mobile phones and video games while children are going to bed.
- **Return jacks-in-the-boxes** to their bedrooms and ignore repeated calling out for drinks and other attempts to keep you busy. Make yourself scarce. Go to another part of the house and be unwilling to be drawn into a game of the children's making. Only nightmares and earthquakes should cause you to go to their bedrooms.

WHAT TO AVOID

- **Over-stimulating children before bedtime.** Engaging kids in a friendly wrestling match on the floor five minutes before bed-time will ensure you have a real battle on your hands.
- Allowing children who delayed bedtime to sleep in to make up for lost sleep. This will ensure that they stay awake at night. Wake children at the same time each morning.



Parenting *ideas*
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