

Trouble with the school aged child going to bed

By Natalie Ebrill

The older child can be easier or harder to deal with in terms of applying a strategy for going to and staying in bed. While it may appear easy to use your parental power and negotiating skills, it is also harder dealing with the louder, more mobile, determined, sometimes manipulative child who knows how to push your buttons and verbalise their frustrations. This age group requires more time and effort in after school sports, help with homework and assignments, presentations, reading, transport to parties and play dates etc. which can be very wearing on your patience and energy leading to a situation that is common in younger babies "peace at any price".

In planning a new approach for "going to and staying in bed" for 5 years and over, we investigate some similar issues as for a baby/toddler and then some new age related ones.

Diet: Is something in their diet keeping them awake or making them tired in the daytime? A healthy diet that promotes stamina during the day, growth and sleep contains water, fruit, vegetables, whole grains, protein, healthy snacks and limited "sometimes" food on special occasions. Often children with sleeping issues can consume too many foods with colouring and sugar and increasingly also many children are showing signs of a food intolerance in healthy choices such as the type of bread, fruit and vegetable they are eating. Some foods can encourage night waking with the child looking like they have had 12 hours sleep and bread can make some children fall asleep after lunch at school. An immunologist can provide screening for intolerances and allergies.

Exercise: Is your child wearing themselves out after school and begging you for vegetables and bed? There is lots of information in the media suggesting at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day for children and adults. But unless this was a regular routine in your childhood or in your adult life you may not appreciate the value of it for your children. Exercise promotes a healthy weight, cardiovascular health, strong bones, reduces stress, helps diminish anger, stabilizes hormones in teenagers, releases the 'happy' hormone adrenaline, promotes talking time and bonding within the family, encourages the child taking up a team sport, making friends and learning a new skill. Your child will come home hungry and more likely to eat what you have prepared and be relaxed and ready for bed soon after dinner and homework.

Television: 30 mins of childrens' television makes their brain feel like they have done 8 hours of 'work', tired mentally and fuzzy. If they watch television after school this may prevent them having the motivation to want to exercise, reduce their homework and reading time. If your child watches television just before bed they will not have the ability to wind down their brain for sleep because their thoughts will be related to the program.

Books: Reading sensible, calm material is a lovely bonding activity just prior to bed. Discuss a practical time limit and reading material. Mem Fox Australian Author suggests children be read to from birth. Teachers recommend children from the start of school be encouraged to read every night with a parent. The children who read the most books each week tend to be the smartest in the class. Do what you can and aim for a period of time that is practical for your family. Children appreciate one-on-one opportunities to cuddle up with a book, especially when they have siblings to share you with.

Bedtime Routine: Children thrive on routine and predictability. Even if the timing goes off schedule sometimes it will help your child to have an order to the wind down time before bed. Something like, afternoon tea/homework, exercise/sport, baths, dinner, finish homework, teeth, last drink of water, toilet, reading, stating your expectations for staying in bed (unless going to the toilet or other necessary reason), reminding of your agreed rewards and staying goodnight in a positive way. If your child comes out of the room they should be returned to their bed without speaking or answering any questions. Your child is asking for attention by coming out of the room. If they are feeling that they haven't been receiving enough attention, any attention will do positive or negative. Our positive attention can be provided with the reading time before bed and other activities, we are refusing to play a game and reward the negative behaviour.

Plan a family meeting: Your plan for an improved bedtime routine will need cooperation from both parents so the child cannot play one off against the other and one parent is not responsible for every bedtime.

Check for worms: Worms prevent your child from going to sleep because they are irritating your child's sensitive skin, increase the frequency of urination and bedwetting. See the Sleep and Settle® newsletter for an article on how to treat and prevent worms.

Other Tricks: Rescue remedy is a homeopathic preparation that calms and relaxes the nervous system. It comes in a spray or drops and can be offered as frequently as needed. 'Music for dreaming' is a relaxation cd that encourages sleep and returning to sleep due to it's gentle beat. Sometimes children's activity can cause their spine to be out of alignment, so seeing a chiropractor with a gentle hands technique can make sure the spine isn't pinching a nerve and compromising the function of bodily organs and interfering with sleep. Learning to deep breath

and trying visualization of happy holidays and places can help take your child's mind off their worries and think happy thoughts before sleep. Consider bullying or other problems happening at school, communicate your concerns with your child's teacher, they will be able to watch your child and look for potential issues. Cranial-sacral therapy may also identify areas your children are worried about and release tension in the body. See a homeopath for a remedy to help relax for sleep, reduce known or unknown fears or address any other issue.

Rewards/Consequences: Consider star charts, jobs charts, positive behaviour charts. Ask your child to nominate the rewards for staying in bed, cooperating at bedtime and helping around the house. Ration weekend TV watching, computer time, iPods, favourite toys, play-dates, etc as consequences and rewards.

Role modeling: Consider asking an older friend, cousin, neighbour about 12-14 years to visit your child and make a fuss of their bedroom and the comfy bed and ask about the rewards you offer for staying in bed and sleeping all night. You can pay the older helper with a movie ticket and ask for a follow up phone call to check up on your child within the week. Young children usually really respect and admire the teenagers and may listen to them over you.

© 2008 **Natalie Ebrill- Sleep and Settle -Baby Sleep Consultant 0-5 yrs**
RN, Child and Family Health Nurse. Mother of three daughters.

I want to give you your life back!

Would you appreciate being empowered with an understanding of your baby's needs and a gentle strategy that you apply to your baby/toddler's personality?

Do you feel like you've read everything and nothing is working?

Visit <http://www.sleepandsettle.com.au>

for free articles or to download your Sleep Package.

