

Bedtime Strategies for Parents and Young Children

1.) Have some quiet time before bedtime; “winding down” is the objective. Share affection (both parents if possible) with the child. You want the child to have a *positive* association with bedtime. Early bedtimes can be effective punishment for some things, but often it is *not* a good punishment/disciplinary consequence for a child who strongly opposes bedtime. It causes a *negative* association with the idea of ‘going to bed’.

2.) Consider reading a story together while the child is tucked in under the covers. If the child doesn’t like stories, consider playing a not-too-exciting game for a few minutes while they are sitting up in bed (tic-tac-toe, checkers, hangman, connect the dots/fences, etc.).

3.) Get child to talk about his/her day tomorrow, and the next few days. Talk about any fears, worries, or anything that may be bothersome.

4.) Talk to your child about some pleasant, happy things that s/he might look forward to: a family vacation, weekend getaway, Christmas, birthday, visiting a family friend/relative, etc.

5.) Consider encouraging the child to take a stuffed animal, blanket or not-too-stimulating toy to bed (or to keep near his/her bed). This can help him/her to feel more secure, and might also *positively distract* the child from other bothersome thoughts, getting their mind on something pleasant and fun while they wind down and doze off.

6.) Provide a night light, or if the child doesn’t seem to be afraid, and denies being scared of the dark or anything at night, you might want to do the opposite: make it darker, and/or less stimulating around the child’s sleeping quarters. Look around the semi-dark room for anything that might be stimulating or keeping the child awake at night. Definitely don’t allow use of TV, videogames, snacks, late meals, taking out toys to play with, etc.