

## Establishing a Bedtime Routine

Bedtime is part of every day and should have a routine just like meal times. If your child has not been in a bedtime routine you need to introduce the idea to her/him. Here's how to do it:

- Tell your child at tea time that they will be going to bed at 7.30pm and show them on the clock what that time will look like.
- Encourage them to decide at tea time what they would like to do between then and bedtime.
- At 6.45pm you need to tell your child that it is time to start getting ready for bed and talk to them about what needs to be done before they are ready to get into bed. Such as bath time, toilet, brushing teeth.
- When all of this is done remind them again that they have to be in bed by 7.30pm.
- Then you can introduce a bedtime story – so allow your child to pick a short book and tell them that you will read it to them just before they go to sleep. It is good to have them in bed while you sit on the bed or on a chair beside the bed and read the story.
- Sometimes children need time to unwind so at 7.10pm say that your child must get into bed and they can have 10 minutes in bed to do an activity on their own such as playing with Lego, a book or colouring.
- When the 10 minutes are up tell them that you will be back to read their bedtime story after which they will have to go to sleep.
- Tell them they must stay in the bed and definitely in the bedroom when doing their 10 minute activity.
- At 7.20 p.m. you can then come and tuck them in and read the story. Be very clear that when you have finished one story that you have to go back to the kitchen and they must go to sleep
- If your child follows you a few minutes later just take them by the hand and say it is bedtime in an even tempered tone and put them back into bed – no other conversation should take place and don't allow them to have anything such as drinks or snacks (ensure if they are due a drink or snack they get it as part of preparing for bed or leave a small drink in the room, unless you are toilet training).
- If they get up a second or third time do the same thing – stay calm, do not argue with them, do not give in to their demands. Remember if you get mad the child has won – the parent must always be in control of their temper.

- The first few nights will be hard but you must be patient as this is all new to your child and it will take them a little while to get used to the routine and know that you are not going to give in. You must also be consistent – if this is to work you must follow the routine exactly, every night. If there is to be a change in the routine such as at the weekend, make sure you tell the child they will be staying up later so they know that you are not forgetting that there is a routine.
- For children over three years of age it can be good to introduce a star chart to encourage them to buy into the bedtime routine. The child can get a star for each night they go to bed without fuss and you can agree a reward at the end of the week.
- It is important to focus on what your child is doing well in the bedtime routine and try not to use too much energy on what is going wrong. Once you stick to your plan you will be fine.
- If your child fails at getting to sleep and causes a complete racket in the home but was very good at getting ready for bed, make sure to praise them the next day for what they did well and tell them that you are sure they will do better tonight. Try and say everything in a positive way i.e. *'last night you didn't manage to stay in bed when I said you must but tonight I am sure you will try harder'* instead of saying *'last night you were very bold and if you do that again tonight I will be very cross'*.

It is important to make bedtime a pleasant time when your child gets to wind down and have a few minutes quality time with their parent. They may have some news they want to tell you and this can be a good opportunity to do this. The following morning, if your child went to sleep without causing too much hassle, be sure to praise them. Remember positive attention will bring about change in other negative behaviors.

Practice patience, parents want quick changes, children do not.