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GOING TO BED / FALLING ASLEEP

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Avoid Power Struggles. Please remember that ADHD children can have particular difficulty going to bed and falling asleep. Most of the children are not just being oppositional. Helping children with going to bed and falling asleep is a matter of building the evening routines and sleep habits. It is a function of teaching, not just discipline.

Build Bedtime Routine. The children need an evening routine that they can depend upon, even if the actual time changes depending upon that day's schedule. Eventually, the routine itself will help the children fall asleep.

Getting Ready for Bed. Consider having the children get ready for bed (not go to bed) a bit earlier, before something fun. Children are much more motivated to brush their teeth or put on their pajamas or get their clothes out for school if they know a favorite t.v. show or story or card game is waiting.

Have A Clear Bedtime Marker. Having a clear bedtime marker, that is not simply a parent announcing that it is time for bed, makes a big difference. When going to bed interrupts their fun, the youngsters have a negative attitude. If the bedtime comes at the end of a show or at the end of a game played each evening, it is easier for the children to accept.

Wind Down Gradually. ADHD children need the opportunity to wind down before going to bed or they may have a great deal of trouble settling down to fall asleep. Although all children are different, wrestling or goofing around too soon before going to bed can make it difficult for some youngsters to calm down and go to sleep.

Bedtime vs. Sleep Time. Most children don't do well going to their bedrooms before they are ready to go to sleep. Although parents want their adult time, a child who is wide awake in their bedroom is learning to not fall asleep at bedtime. The youngster may get anxious or come out of their room so often as to disrupt their parents' evening anyway. Try timing the bedtime so it is not more than 20 or 30 minutes before sleep time.

Build A Sleep Habit. Most people fall asleep through a series of habits that they have learned over time. Develop a routine that builds sleep habits so that the child can fall asleep on their own. A routine that involves mom or dad reading until they or their child falls asleep will only result in the child needing mom or dad present to be able to fall asleep (almost forcing them to seek mom or dad out in the middle of a night). A sleep habit such

as listening to music or a story on tape is better since it is calming and does not require a parent to be present.

Check In Frequently. If a child is having trouble falling asleep, check in frequently. Reassure the youngster that you will be returning soon. By stopping in and reassuring the child frequently, you will eventually build a sleep habit that involves the child falling asleep sometime shortly after mom or dad has left the bedroom.

Lights Out. Some children seem to almost force themselves to stay up if their bedroom light is on and they can play with their toys. Although they may be quiet, they are awake late into the night. Develop some rules about when the lights need to go out and the sleep habits that are part of having the lights out (e.g. some music or a tape). Children who are afraid of the dark may need to have a light on, but avoid using bright overhead lights because they may awaken the children in the middle of the night.

Address Bedtime Fears. Some children are fearful at night and worry about going to sleep alone. This can be a perfectly normal stage of a child's development. It is important to understand the child's anxiousness and do what you can to help them handle the worry. They may need a flashlight by their bed or a chance to make sure a window is locked. Some youngsters need to know that mom or dad is still nearby and actually do better if they can hear the television while parents are watching. Other children do well with their cat or dog to keep them company. Children who are fearful of nightmares can learn to imagine and plan fun dreams as part of going to sleep.

Reward Bedtime Routine. Don't reward children for falling asleep by a certain time. It is better to reinforce them for cooperating with the bedtime routine.

Teach the Connection. Children need to learn about sleep and why it is important. They respond better to bedtime and sleep time rules if they are part of the decision-making process. A child's bedtime and sleep time is not dictated by a parent, it is determined by the child's sleep needs. If children do not get enough sleep, it affects their mood, health, performance, learning etc. Children who don't cooperate with the bedtime routine, and lose sleep as a result, may miss out on important opportunities to play with a friend or sleep over at someone's house. A child that has worked hard to follow the routine may find that important opportunities become available (e.g. the chance to stay up later on a particular night).

Teach by Modeling. Children can learn to get to sleep better if they understand more about their parents' bedtime routines.

Talk to Your Doctor. Stimulant medications can lead to sleeplessness that affects a child long after their medication supposedly has "worn off." Some children experience a medication rebound that also can make it hard for them to go to sleep. Talk to your doctor about your child's medication schedule. Sometimes we need to taper the dose over the

course of the day or change the medication schedule. Some children need to switch to a different medicine. Interestingly, there are some youngsters who go to bed easier and fall asleep quicker with a small dose of medication; it seems to help them focus and settle down well enough to go to sleep.

Sleep Aids. Talk to your doctor about foods that naturally encourage sleepiness at bedtime. Be careful about foods with caffeine, particularly before bedtime. Some ADHD children take medication to help with both self-control and sleep, although this is a step most physicians would like to avoid if possible.

Regular Wake-Up Time! It is sometimes easier to help a child with his or her sleep cycle by establishing a regular wake-up time first. For children who have particular difficulty falling asleep, the wake-up schedule needs to include weekends.

Consider A Much Later Bedtime. Consider having your child go to bed as late as possible, with the idea that they are almost certain to fall asleep as soon as their head hits the pillow. Don't worry, the combination of the regular wake-up time and improved evening routine will allow you to gradually move the bedtime to a reasonable hour. Since a child's sleep clock or circadian rhythm naturally shifts as they approach adolescence, we may need to accept the fact that they go to bed later and get up later. For teenagers, an earlier school schedule may not match their natural sleep rhythms. A short nap in the afternoon is sometimes helpful.

Consider An Earlier Bedtime. Parents may sometimes notice a time in the evening when their child seems tired, but then gets a "burst of energy." In actuality, the child may then have an even harder time settling down to fall asleep because they are overtired. Parents may need to experiment with their child's sleep schedule to determine which one works best.

Evaluate Your Child's Sleep Needs. Children have different sleep needs. The difficulty your child may have going to bed or falling asleep may not be a sleep "problem" at all. A child who needs less sleep may present a problem for parents, however, who wish some "adult" time. The challenge then becomes one of arranging schedules and routines to give parents sufficient time to meet their own needs and their needs as a couple.

Accept the "Clock." People have different biological sleep clocks. Some people are earlier risers, some are night owls that naturally sleep in late in the morning. Your child's sleep clock may not match your evening needs or the school schedule. Although there are some things we can do to adjust the sleep clock, we need to appreciate a child's sleep pattern. We sometimes create more problems by asking a youngster to go to bed before they are "ready." We would be better off finding some quiet evening activities or using the evening time to prepare for the next morning.

Shift the "Clock." We can help shift a child's sleep clock in a number of ways. We should stick to a regular wake-up time (which is more important than a regular bedtime). We can start the evening earlier (move up the mealtime and the entire evening schedule). Adding bright light in the morning and turning down light in the evening may also help. It can also to reduce light in the evening, by turning down the lights and even wearing sunglasses! Beware of bright night lights that "trick the body's sleep clock. It generally is a poor idea to have an overhead light on while the child is sleeping. In rare cases, we actually adjust a person's sleep clock by keeping them up at night and over the course of successive evenings help establish a more traditional bedtime (we do this only in consultation with a physician).

Getting Out of Bed. Many parents experience frustration when their children continually get of bed when they are supposed to be going to sleep. We need to know why children are getting out of bed before we can address the problem. Are they simply not tired or do they need help in learning how to fall asleep? Are they fearful or anxious about not being able to fall asleep? If parents feel as if they are adequately addressing the sleep issues, they can take a more behavioral approach which rewards a child for staying in their room or discourages them for coming out unnecessarily (doing a simple chore together to make use of the "excess energy").

Understand Night Time Wakenings. There are a number of reasons why children wake up during the night. For most children, nighttime awakenings are a natural part of child development that resolve themselves in a few weeks or months. Some children have night terrors or nightmares (consult your doctor for the very important difference between a nightmare and night terror). Other youngsters are experiencing some stressor or adjustment problem that is disrupting their sleep. In some cases, it can be something as simple as a furnace that turns on in the middle of the night or a delivery truck that has a new early morning schedule. Parents don't realize how their early morning activity can awaken their child. It is important that we understand why our children are awakening, before we address the problem.

Change the Habits. Most of us awaken several times each evening but we fall back asleep without remembering it in the morning. Children who wake up and come into their parents' bed (disrupting everyone's sleep), usually do so because they are unable to fall back asleep on their own the way the rest of us do. As we change the bedtime habit of falling asleep with mom or dad, the children won't need to come into their parents bedroom. A sleepy parent may inadvertently reinforce their child's coming into the bedroom; they should instead help their child return to their own bed. Parents who are deep sleepers (and don't know that their children have come into the bed) should consider a chain lock which allows the door to be ajar but prevents children from coming into the bedroom undetected.

Listen to the Breathing. If your child snores or breathes heavily at night, her or she may have some airway obstructions that interfere with the quality of sleep. Please talk to your doctor if this is a concern. Problems with sleep obstruction can lead to a misdiagnosis of ADHD and needs to be addressed by a physician.

Avoid Sleep Deprivation. Children who are tired in the morning and hard to awaken may be experiencing some sleep deprivation. While they may not appear sleepy at night, they may have a hard time settling down for bed because they are overtired. Many children need more sleep than they are currently getting. Children can commonly require 10 or 11 hours of sleep, although sleep needs do vary. Please remember that a child's sleep debt cannot be recouped in just one night.