

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Bedtime Routine Leads to Sweet Dreams*

“**I** SLEEP ALL NIGHT WITH MY EYES OPEN,” a four-year-old boy told me. “It’s the only way to stay safe.” The fear he talked about was making the trip to the bathroom in the dark. For young children, feeling afraid is a common sleep disturber. Four-year-olds, who can imagine more things to be scared about than their younger siblings, often want to crawl into their parents’ beds. But so do six-year-olds who get anxious. One boy, almost seven, told me that although he’s not afraid of the dark anymore, he does get scared by nightmares. He said, “I try to wake myself up, then go get my mom. She gets in bed with me.”

Instinctively, most parents know that helping their children to relax before bed helps them fall asleep more easily and rest more deeply. When I read some relaxation stories to two children spending the night, they relaxed so deeply that they found it difficult to wake up in the morning. Happy thoughts also help us relax during sleep. Many parents have lovely talks with their children, but bedtime might not be the best time to explore the most difficult situations of the day.

Children’s stress often expresses itself through sleep issues—difficulty falling or staying asleep, suddenly wetting the bed. Some parents note that night terrors often occur after a stressful day.

Children’s bedtimes are an ideal time for parents to practice letting go of their worries so they can help a son or daughter do the same. The time right before sleep is often a suggestible period—a time when we can whisper things children do that delight us. We can use their half-sleep to plant positive ideas about how the night will go and how happy their morning will be.

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