

Transform

Bedtime Struggles

into

Nighttime Snuggles



Connected
Families



Introduction

Do you have a toddler who struggles to settle down to sleep? Or older kids who resist and argue with gusto about bedtime? Are you spending an inordinate amount of time going through a bedtime routine each night?

Perhaps you thought sleep would be natural, or that standard sleep-training methods would lead to your child sleeping through the night. You may have even heard the recommendation to let kids “cry it out”. But there’s typically more to helping kids sleep through the night than prescriptive sleep methods.

Sometimes children experience bedtime struggles due to separation anxiety or fear. Sometimes children are “live wires” whose nervous systems don’t slow down very well. Sometimes a child’s curiosity and intensity keeps them energized, not wanting to miss out on anything exciting.

There are many reasons sleep can be difficult for children, and a one-size-fits-all approach can often lead to more struggles. This eBook is written to equip parents and caregivers to wisely and insightfully work with their unique child and move toward better sleep for everyone. Read on for lots of practical ideas to help your child.

Meet the Authors

I am Lynne Jackson, OTR (Occupational Therapist, Registered), and co-founder of [Connected Families](#). I'm writing with consultation and input from Christina Spaeth-Harrer, OTR. Christina has spent much of her occupational therapy career [coaching families with sleep struggles](#).

Together, Christina and I apply our knowledge as occupational therapists as well as our decades of experience in helping hundreds of parents address sleep challenges. We trust our knowledge will bring you a very holistic approach to your child's struggle with sleep, and we believe you'll find lots of practical help in this ebook! Of course, if you feel you need additional help after reading this book, you may want to reach out to your child's physician, a pediatric occupational therapist, or a sleep specialist.



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How much sleep does your child need?

A good night's sleep is right up there with diet as a foundation for both physical and emotional health. Helping kids develop and learn healthy sleep patterns will equip them for life. Sleep has a profound impact on emotional well-being, physical skills and safety, athletic performance, cognitive abilities and memory, and health factors including immunity, heart health, cancer, and life span. If your child is sleep deprived, they are even more likely to read someone else's facial expressions as antagonistic. This could explain a few cranky-kid sibling conflicts!

Sharing the many benefits of sleep with older kids is a great way to help instill an understanding of the value of sleep and decrease power struggles. For a fascinating read on all the amazing things that happen in your brain and body while you sleep, check out [Why We Sleep](#) by leading sleep researcher, Matthew Walker, PhD.

Experts suggest children need the following amounts of sleep:

• One- to two-year-olds	14 hours of sleep: 12 hours at night and 1-2 naps
• Preschoolers	10-13 hours
• School age children	9-11 hours
• Teens	8-10 hours



Does your child have a sleep problem?

If you're reading this eBook you likely already suspect your child may be sleep deprived. The signs of a sleep problem are not pleasant.

Some of the signs your child *obviously* needs more sleep:

- A young child is often rubbing their eyes, or is frequently drowsy and falls asleep in the car or after dinner.
- Or older kids (after age 6) might nap or sleep in longer on the weekend, even when they go to bed at their normal bedtime.

On the other hand, your child might exhibit more subtle warning signs:

- Unusually active, but clumsy (may look like they are using movement to stay awake, but without good sensory awareness)
- Irritable, emotionally fragile, or defiant
- Struggles with transitions
- Difficulty playing alone
- Frequently sick
- Trouble concentrating or getting organized
- More argumentative

Do you (the parent/caregiver) have a sleep problem?

What about you? When your kids' lack of sleep interrupts *your* sleep, it can cause *everyone* to struggle. Parents of kids who wake up at night tend to have interrupted sleep. Maybe your only clue that something is wrong is that *you* are exhausted.

Do you find that you need caffeine or naps during the day? Do you exhibit any of the same signs of sleep problems as your child does? Being well-rested helps you to better handle the stress of the day. Even 4-6 hours of uninterrupted sleep can make a big difference. If you've got young kids, try to go to bed when they do. If you've got someone who can help by taking a shift overnight, try to work out a mutually beneficial schedule.

Take a holistic approach to sleep: Incorporate body, mind, heart, and spirit

In this book we will consider four primary arenas for helping your child get the rest they need. We'll dive into practical strategies to prepare your child's *body, mind, heart, and spirit* for a great night of sleep.

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BODY: Calm and Regulated

A child's day greatly affects their night. Anxiety and stress during the day can set off fight-or-flight chemistry that affects cortisol levels during sleep. This hormone can substantially disrupt kids' sleep, feeding a cycle of needing and creating more cortisol during the day just to stay alert.

Insomnia and other forms of sleep deprivation cause your body to secrete more cortisol during the day, perhaps in an effort to stimulate alertness. For more information on how cortisol levels can affect sleep, check out these [studies from the National Institute of Health](#) or read more in [this Healthline article](#).

One mom described this challenge: "My kids are really struggling to fall asleep at night, but during the day they are yawning and rubbing their eyes."

Here are some common reasons that healthy cortisol levels, melatonin, or the physiological sleep process can be disrupted:

- Irregular or missed meals and naps
- Going to bed either [hungry](#) or too full from a late dinner
- Inconsistent bedtimes
- Skipped snacks or high carb snacks, [especially before bed](#)
- Limited exposure to morning light
- Lack of exercise during the day
- Intense activity late in the evening such as sports, friends visiting, outside time, playing competitive games, wrestling or tickle time (Although [play-wrestling](#) can be *really* beneficial for kids at other times, it increases *alertness* and *body temperature*, both of which need to *decrease* for a child to fall asleep.)
- Schoolwork 1-2 hours before bedtime can increase cortisol levels, and even reading can make it difficult to fall asleep if kids are excited about the content
- Screen time or bright lights before bed
- Bath time can be soothing for *some* kids, but both the transition in and out, and the exposure of bare, wet skin can be alerting
- A house that is too warm
- Insufficient wind-down time, i.e. reading, storytelling, quiet games, connecting, doing puzzles, Legos, drawing, back rub time, etc. Kids often need 1-1.5 hours of general calm time in the evening (including their regular structured bedtime routine)

What's the solution to this?

- Natural circadian rhythms and routines
- Pleasant, calming sensory activities
- Decreased stressful sensory experiences

“Helping your child’s body be **calm and regulated** centers around:

- Natural circadian rhythms and routines
- Pleasant, calming sensory activities
- Decreased stressful sensory experiences”

Create natural rhythms and routines

One core brain function principle is that anything unpredictable, or [arrhythmic](#), is alerting and potentially stressful. Alternatively, anything predictable and rhythmic calms and organizes the nervous system. It helps to get in sync with the natural daily rhythms God has built into us for sleep.

Circadian rhythms

[Circadian rhythms](#) are physical, mental, and behavioral changes that follow a daily cycle. They have a significant impact on our quality of sleep. Circadian rhythms use the natural changes during the day in both light and temperature as their guide.

Both cortisol (a stress hormone, but also a wakefulness hormone) and melatonin (a sleep hormone) follow your circadian rhythm. For example, bright light and warm temperatures signal to the body, “It’s daytime, not much need for melatonin. Crank up the cortisol.” Darkness, and cooler temperatures signal to the system, “It’s night time - time for sleep, so crank up the melatonin! Reduce cortisol.”

To keep in step with circadian rhythms, expose kids to bright natural light early in the day and avoid screens before bedtime. Then help kids go down for bed with light clothing in a cool room. Preferred temperature would be 65 degrees F/18.3 degrees C.

When our first child was small I thought that being a caring mother meant bundling him up nice and cozy for bed. Poor kid, he looked more like he was ready to play in the snow than to sleep!



“Here’s a little **bonus tip** regarding sleep temperature. [Some research](#) suggests that **slight warming of hands and feet** (i.e. letting kids sleep in socks) actually causes your body to *lose* heat faster through a process called vasodilation! In this case, losing heat is good, as it allows your child’s core body temperature to drop and send signals to your child’s brain that it’s time for sleep. In fact, the [research](#) suggests, slightly warming the feet can **help people fall asleep up to 20% faster**.

Of course, not all socks are equal. Ensure that your child wears **loose, breathable socks**—not tight or extra warm, fluffy socks. Remember, the goal is heat loss. And if your child is opposed to socks, don’t worry, sometimes the [instinct for an uncovered foot](#) is right on. Go with what’s comfortable for your child and experiment with what helps. Again, **the goal is nighttime heat loss.**”

Set a predictable bedtime routine

Predictability and rhythm during the day also support circadian rhythms. One of the most essential things to help a sensitive child sleep well is a consistent day-to-day schedule and bedtime routine.

Leading expert Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, author of [Sleepless in America](#) and [Raising Your Spirited Baby](#), guides parents of young kids to establish a helpful bedtime routine. It is important to try and keep the child’s bedtime as consistent as possible. Start the routine significantly before your goal of actually getting kids to sleep.

Aim to have a structured, consistent routine that is no more than half an hour. Some kids benefit from a picture schedule of exactly how this routine will go. Predictability and familiarity decrease anxiety.

The more anxious your child is, the more it will help to determine a routine and *practice it during the day* a few times, when everyone is less anxious. You can even take pictures of each element and tape or velcro the pictures in a convenient location. Your child can remove each picture at bedtime when that step is completed. Here is an [example from Etsy](#):



You can also list all the things your child decides they will need (setting a limit on a reasonable number). Make sure important things like pacifiers can’t get lost by attaching them with a **short** string to the pillowcase or a stuffed animal. (Do not attach to the child as this can be a choking risk.)

What happens if your child wakes up during the night? The routine for tucking a child into bed should be the same if they wake up during the night as it was during the bedtime routine. Try to avoid giving any assistance during the night that is alerting or would make it harder for them to fall back asleep independently. We give lots of ideas about this later in the ebook.

Incorporate pleasant, calming, sensory activities throughout the day

Experiment with a few of the options below to physically calm your sensitive child. In the end, incorporate what is helpful into your routine.

- Begin your day with intense, big muscle activities, preferably outside to help with melatonin cycles. This could also include activities such as hiking, climbing, playing on a jungle gym or swing set, bike riding, etc. See [60 Ways to Get Kids Moving and Laughing](#) for lots of ideas. Big muscle work helps

increase calming because it uses up the natural “ready for self-defense action” neurochemistry that happens with anxiety and decreases cortisol. [Ecclesiastes 5:12](#) even speaks to the sleep-inducing characteristic of big muscle work compared to a life of ease: “The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.”

- Before bedtime, gradually increase the calming factor in your routine activities. Try some of these [50 calming ideas](#).



- Some kids do well with a nice warm shower or bath before bed (see clarifications above), but not because they end up nice and toasty. It’s the opposite. [Matthew Walker](#) states, “When you get out of the bath... dilated blood vessels on the surface quickly help radiate out inner heat, and your core body temperature plummets. Consequently you fall asleep more quickly because your core is colder.”
- Provide a bedtime drink of water with a long curly straw since resistive suck facilitates calming (i.e. like babies who fall asleep nursing).
- [CalmConnect](#) is a video series of rhythmical movement activities, designed specifically to be very calming. There are lots of difficulty levels so it is a good match for children of almost any age. You and your child can imitate the video movements together as part of your bedtime routine (making sure the screen is in “night mode” to reduce blue light, of course). It will calm your brain also, which is great for tired, stressed parents. One parent reported, “When we do CalmConnect before bed, my daughter is not getting up in the middle of the night anymore. She’s going to bed much easier because it’s so calming and regulating.” This product is an online subscription with a 90-day money back guarantee.

- Experiment with [pleasant deep pressure](#) massage methods to arms, legs, and back. You may even consider using lavender lotion or oil if your child likes it. Make sure the input is slow and rhythmical, and follow your child’s lead. If your child asks you to tickle their feet or scratch their head, even if *you* think that would not be calming, give it a try. Watch for signs of relaxed movement and slowed breathing and do whatever is helpful.
- Try a big bean bag for pressure. You can even make one by knotting a pillowcase and filling it with rice or beans! Consider warming it slightly in the microwave and put a calming scent, like lavender, on it.
- Lots of kids benefit from a [weighted blanket](#). They may fall asleep easier and sleep longer. Consider keeping the bedroom even cooler if you use a weighted blanket. A great option for calming weight is a [Comfy Buddy](#). They are adorable, weighted stuffed animals that can be cooled in the freezer or heated gently in the microwave as your child prefers, and part of the stuffing is dried lavender. (See the following sections for research and more options on the use of stuffed animals at bedtime.)
- Practice calming breaths and mindfulness with this book, [Bunny Breaths](#).
- Use these [stuffed animals](#) to voice record comforting scriptures or affectionate messages from you.
- Consider having your child use a [Zenimal](#) which provides calming music and breathing guidance. This screen-free device is controlled by your child, and is great for using during a nighttime wake up or for calming when falling asleep.

Consider supplements* when circadian rhythms don’t come naturally

Dr. Roberto Olivardia is a clinical psychologist and lecturer at Harvard Medical School who specializes in the treatment of various challenges including ADHD, anxiety, depression, and sleep dysfunction. He believes that low doses of melatonin can be helpful because sensitive, distractible, high energy kids may not be making melatonin in the same way as neurotypical kids. An alternative to using melatonin every night is to

*** If you are considering using supplements to help your child, be sure to first consult your child’s doctor.**

use it only on those evenings when kids are unusually energetic or get home late and are off their schedule. You may even consider keeping some in your car!

Please note that melatonin may not work the same for every child, and infrequently can make sleep more difficult. One mother shared her experience with us:

“We’ve seen this a number of times with [our daughter]... if we didn’t get the melatonin window just right then it backfired and she would be up crying for an hour and a half! It’s probably a small percentage who might run into that but this [[powdered magnesium supplement](#)] is what our doctor recommended instead.”

Several parents have also reported positive results from a [probiotic](#) compound.

“My kids don’t wear pajamas!” and other sensory troubleshooting tips

Kids who have trouble falling asleep often have sensitive bodies and may flop around on their beds trying to wind down. They can be irritated by small sounds, need to have the light and covers just right, etc. You can acknowledge that sensitivity and reassure your child that you understand them: “God has given you a beautifully sensitive body. Some things feel really good to you, and some things feel kind of yucky. What can we do to help your body feel really good when it’s time for sleep?”

Here are some strategies to help you troubleshoot what your child needs:

- If a shower or bath causes your child to become more alert or stressed, you can just wipe off the dirt and let them shower in the morning. ;-)
- [Turn off screens](#) and ceiling lights 1-2 hours before bedtime and use soft lamps or nightlights instead.
- Turn down the house thermostat 2 hours before bedtime.
- Some kids get anxious sleeping flat, and a [wedge pillow](#) may feel comforting for them.
- If bedtime commotion with siblings is too much for your sensitive child, you can schedule separate bedtimes or split them up between caregivers, if possible.
- If your child is averse to sitting on a cold toilet seat right before bed, warm it up with a blow dryer. While this might seem extreme, this was very beneficial to our daughter who was sensitive-to-cold. For her, that final trip to the potty was like sitting on an ice cube! She shared with me as a young adult, “The blow dryer helped, but I liked it best when you sat on it first, Mom.” Ahh, the



personal touch communicates extra caring, I guess.

- Your kids don’t want pajamas? You’re not alone. Bedtime hygiene activities and clothing changes can be tough for a sensitive child. It usually goes more smoothly if [calming tactile input](#) such as massage, squishes with a pillow or cushion, deep rub with a soft towel, etc. occurs in preparation for putting on pajamas. And if this still is a huge issue, remember, your child will still be alive in the morning if they sleep in their clothes, or [sleep without clothes!](#)
- Any unpleasant, stressful self-care activities such as tooth brushing or changing into pajamas can be done earlier in the evening before the child is fatigued and more easily agitated. This adjustment made a big difference for our daughter who could have a 45-minute crying spell over brushing her teeth.



- Giving kids maximum control during tooth brushing decreases stress. Try putting their hand over yours as the two of you guide the toothbrush together. It can also be helpful if they rub their gums with a clean finger first. A high quality electric toothbrush can also be less aversive and more effective, and increase your child's independence.
- Enclosed spaces reduce extra stimulation and can feel cozy and safe. Your child may do better in a sleeping bag in their closet, or in a [sleep tent](#). Our kids loved this on occasion, and called it their "nest."
- If your child loves to feel deep pressure one alternative to a weighted blanket is a [snuggle sheet](#), which wraps around the mattress and "swaddles" them while they sleep.
- Leave white noise on or offer ear plugs if you think little night time noises are keeping your child awake.

Remember:

Your goal is to make bedtime the "dessert to your day." Rather than feel anxious or frustrated about the bedtime routine, think about how you can make bedtime a time of connection as you prepare their body - and yours!



MIND: Settled

Does your child flop around on their bed, complain about being bored, or sing or talk loudly when you leave? Some intense, active kids simply need more stimulation than others. Either their bodies and sensory systems will fill the need for stimulation, or their brains will become more alert.

Dr. Olivardia states that [sleep is tougher for kids with ADHD](#), whose brains are wired to seek stimulation all the time. It's really difficult for them to come down from the stimulation of the day. After all, **"Sleeping is lying in a boring, dark room waiting for nothing to happen."** It's challenging doing that all by yourself, when you would rather be with cool, interesting people like mom and dad or other caregivers.

Provide a focal point

It helps to figure out what intensity and what kind of stimulation your child needs, so their brains can dial downward to sleep. They may need an interesting, but calming, focal point when the "excitement of you" leaves the room. There are a variety of ways to provide this for kids:

- **Visual focus:** An intriguing, gently lighted device such as a [lava lamp](#) or [ceiling star night light](#) can help to meet a child's need for stimulation in a calming way. A child we know went to bed much easier when he had a fish tank with a little swimming "buddy" to watch and keep him company.
- **Visual focus:** A sleep training alarm clock can be helpful, especially for early rising kids. [One version](#) is a puppy with a ball that glows red for sleeptime and then becomes green when it's ok to wake up. A mom stated, "My daughter has done well at being quiet until he turns green. Now that she is three she says, 'Puppy green now' and knows that we will come and get her."

- **Auditory focus:** Lullabies are traditionally the go-to calming bedtime music; the same instrumental song playing on repeat can provide a calming focus. However, Dr. Olivaridia notes that ADHD kids may need livelier, louder music (like he did as a child). Experiment and see what works.
- **Auditory focus:** [A Jooki music player](#) loaded with lullabies and audiobooks that a young (3-year-old) can select independently may be a good option. A short audio book can be helpful. However, some creative, intense kids may get too excited about the story, so choose your story wisely. One mom remembers that as a child when she listened to her favorite story at bedtime, she often knew that although she was really *tired*, she would fight to stay awake so she could listen all the way to the end.
- **Fine motor focus:** After adults leave, your child may be comforted by a quiet activity such as reading, drawing, or playing with a small manipulative toy while in bed.
- **For older kids:** You may consider something like this [sunset/sunrise alarm clock](#) to help with sleep/wake cycles.



Work to decrease nighttime anxiety

A pleasant focal point is helpful, but might not be enough to settle your child’s overactive mind. Negative, anxious emotions come naturally to us at night. [Experiments suggest](#) that the amygdala (a brain region that processes emotional events) becomes overactive when you are tired. Many kids who have trouble sleeping have *chronically* heightened anxiety, which even includes [differences in heart rate](#) compared to typical peers. Add in normal nighttime elevation in anxiety to that and you have an even greater chance of sleep challenges. A great resource for helping anxious kids in general is [The Opposite of Worry](#), by Lawrence Cohen.

Next, we’ll examine several strategies to decrease the worry and anxiety that is contributing to bedtime difficulty.

Build confidence throughout the day

If kids spend their day feeling small, powerless, and ordered around by giant adults, it can feed their overall anxiety, which then multiplies at bedtime. The [Discipline That Connects with Your Child’s Heart](#) messages naturally reduce conflict and stress between parents and kids, and increase healthy confidence:

- You are safe.
- You are loved no matter what.
- You are called and capable.
- You are responsible for your actions.

Build your child’s confidence during the day by increasing choices, and providing opportunities to take on challenges, be a leader, or help others.

Bravery challenges

You can build an identity of being brave by dreaming up “bravery challenges” together (quick little activities that are slightly scary but fun). For example, have your child run downstairs to find an object and run back up, or wait in a dark closet for you to find them. Then celebrate when your child is successful! See what slightly bigger challenge they may want to try next.

Powerful play

Another great way to build confidence is through powerful play. Kids struggle to identify difficult feelings with words, and play is the language kids speak the best. Children often use play to process their emotions. For example, many kids overcome a fear of medical appointments by giving pretend shots to a caregiver. [Attachment Play](#) by Aletha Solter is a great resource.

Anxious, sleep-challenged kids can benefit greatly from fun games or play-wrestling that make them feel powerful. You can set your child up to feel powerful by letting them knock you over or by playing the bumbling buffoon as you roughhouse. One dad lets his anxious daughter freeze and unfreeze the “big monster” (him) that awkwardly chases her. Read a helpful article about Lawrence Cohen’s Playful Parenting [strategies for play wrestling](#).

This confidence-building can apply to [nighttime fears](#) also. You can create stories or facilitate imaginary play in which your child overcomes scary challenges, or outwits the “worry monster” that plots to make them anxious. You can roleplay helping your child defeat the monster, and then switch roles so you are the worried child and they help you. You can guide your child to

turn scary imaginary creatures into something non-threatening and even silly. One mom I coached helped her child dress the “hairy worry spider” in ridiculous outfits and then figure out ways to keep the spider from stealing her joy.

This article about [nighttime fears](#) teaches us that kids “need someone to reassure them, to provide them with a sense of security, and to teach them how to overcome their nighttime fears.”

Building on some of Cohen’s ideas in [The Opposite of Worry](#), you can navigate a child’s fear of monsters in their closet or under their bed with your ever-so-powerful “monster spray.” Make sure you do this with plenty of playful goofiness so your child knows you don’t believe there’s a real monster, but also doesn’t feel condescended towards.

Make your child the leader

You can increase your child’s confidence if you are strategic about games to play before bed. (Try to begin these activities shortly after dinner and before starting your bedtime routine.) Let your child be the *leader* for activities such as *Captain May I?*, *Simon Says*, or *20 Questions*. *Hide-and-Seek* gives kids a chance to practice waiting quietly alone which builds this important bedtime skill. They also know a secret (their location) that an adult doesn’t know, which makes them feel powerful. You could also concoct a story created by taking turns, one sentence at a time, about your child being a hero in crazy situations.

Bring the stuffies into the play

Another way to build confidence at bedtime is to personify your child’s stuffed animals or dolls. This [significantly improves sleep](#) when parents give nighttime companions a character or a role as *protector* or *protected*. As a *protector*, the stuffed animal watches out for the anxious child. Conversely, as *protected*, you are asking the child to protect their stuffed animal or doll. This helps ease anxiety and makes the child feel needed and competent.

“(Protecting a scared stuffed animal) **helps ease anxiety** and makes the child feel needed and competent.”

Teach relaxation and slow breathing

Kids feel empowered when they have the specific tools needed to calm their mind. You can help your child imagine pleasant, favorite places and all the sensory

elements of those places. You can also teach specific [relaxation](#) and [breathing skills](#), but do *not* command an anxious child to do a specific technique or take deep breaths! It almost always makes them more anxious, and they will probably say “No,” or “I can’t!” Start teaching these skills *outside* of bedtime with *lots* of



modeling, playfulness and encouragement.

Help kids understand their “elastic” brain

As you teach your kids practical skills, help them understand that they have great capacity to grow and learn, and that *taking on challenges* (like falling asleep alone) *grows their brain*. This is captured in a teaching concept called “Growth Mindset.” It helps kids learn to be resilient and try new things without being afraid of mistakes or failure. A couple of great book ideas for elementary-age kids include [Your Fantastic, Elastic Brain](#) and [Bubble Gum Brain](#). Growth mindset conversation cards and journals with questions and short, inspirational stories are available at [biglifejournal.com](#). [This video](#) may also help your kids understand what it means to have a Growth Mindset.



Make laughter and humor a part of your nightly routine

Humor [reduces anxiety](#) and improves brain function in general. One 11-year-old girl stated, "[The cure for anxiety is silly dancing.](#)" You could read a humorous story or joke book, watch goofy Youtube videos, or tell a story with very silly voices. So how do you most readily laugh and be goofy with your child? Whatever it is, how might you do that at the beginning of your bedtime routine?

Practice gratitude before bed

When you are filled with anxiety it is difficult to feel grateful. But the opposite is also true: helping your child be grateful decreases their anxiety. "...practicing daily gratitude can contribute to significant shifts in your mental and physical health. While it won't make anxiety disappear overnight, [gratitude can gradually build a new mindset that helps to reduce anxiety over time.](#)" [Research](#) shows as little as two minutes of gratitude practice can help improve your mood.

One mom shared how her family did gratitude at bedtime. "[Philippians 4:8](#) has been a helpful bedtime verse for our family. Instead of 'counting sheep' we encourage our kids to list as many lovely or excellent things as they can while they lay in bed—and to ask God for help if their list runs out. God's list won't ever run out—He created them all!"

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is **true**, whatever is **noble**, whatever is **right**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **admirable** - if anything is **excellent or praiseworthy** - think about such things. ”

Philippians 4:8

Consider starting an affirmation journal with your child

Intentional gratitude when you tuck-in your child lets your child review the pleasant parts of today and look optimistically toward what tomorrow will bring. Many parents I have coached have followed my suggestion to do either a [gratitude journal](#) or a [Philippians 4:8-based affirmation journal](#) at bedtime and have seen this bring more peaceful bedtimes.

To start an affirmation journal, point out ways in which your child has succeeded at making good choices that day. You can communicate something like, "This is how I saw Jesus in you today!" and record these affirmations in a journal.



One mom who used this idea said, "My son, who has the most struggles, would ask me to read him the whole [affirmation journal](#) again starting from the beginning. It was clear that he had been discouraged, and this was really an encouragement to him. It also held me accountable during the day to look for something positive that he had done and add it to the journal."

This journal is a great starter for talking about the ever-present reality of God's wonderful grace. We can remind ourselves and our children of the beautiful truth that, "every good and perfect gift is from above," [James 1:17](#). This affirmation increases kids' confidence to face the challenge of falling asleep alone.

Avoid bedtime battles by teaching peaceful waiting

If kids feel terrified the moment they are alone and desperate for your presence, it's going to be a tough road. An important skill to help them learn to confidently drift off to sleep by themselves is the skill of "[peaceful waiting](#)." You can look for opportunities to practice peaceful waiting during the day.

For example, when they would like a snack you can simply say, "I'd love to help you with that in a few minutes when I'm finished with what I'm doing."

Continue your activity, and then provide the snack with a smile saying, "You did such a good job of peaceful waiting!" Or if they need help, you can say, "Just a minute, I have to go to the bathroom first." Then affirm in the same way when you get back. If you use this method it is important to follow through.

This teaches your child delayed gratification, and discourages whining or demanding behavior. If they don't wait peacefully, simply let your child know, "That felt demanding, I am going to set the timer for two minutes. If you practice peaceful waiting for two minutes, you will have a chance to practice respectful asking." This communicates that you will listen and that you care about what they want, but it also enforces the need to peacefully wait.

Helping your child practice peaceful waiting during the day sets the stage for them to do it successfully in their bed at night.

Visit at gradually increasing intervals (peaceful waiting at bedtime)

One tried and true treatment for anxiety is to gradually expose the anxious person to increasing experiences of the anxiety-producing situation or stimulus. While doing this, give them support or strategies to stay calm. In this case, the anxiety-producing situation is the absence of the parent at bedtime. The goal is to soothe your child's anxiety level before anxiety prompts them to come trotting out of their room to find you. If you visit and affirm your child's peaceful waiting, just like you have practiced during the day, it can increase confidence, decrease anxiety, and continue to build that skill at bedtime until eventually they are able to fall asleep on their own.

“The goal is to **soothe your child's anxiety** level before anxiety prompts them to come trotting out... to find you.”

There are several physicians who have suggested this method of visiting at gradually increasing intervals. We really appreciate the work of [Dr. Harvey Karp](#). These strategies can provide the routine, security, and affection necessary for independence at bedtime.

During the day, before the anxiety of bedtime sets in, you can practice exactly what will happen.

- Tuck your child into bed. Excuse yourself to the bathroom and then return. This is a natural event that has no fear associations.
- Smile, pat your child's back, leave for a few minutes, and return again. Repeat a few times.
- Switch roles and let your child tuck you into bed! (They will love that reversal of power.)
- They can make a trip to the bathroom and come back and pat your back. You smile and wave as your "mom" or "dad" walks out of the room to go to the bathroom.



At bedtime, allow the child to climb into bed independently. Then you can brainstorm a few hand signs with your child to communicate several key things:

- Try a thumbs-up to say "Good job" at peaceful waiting.
- A heart sign with both hands might represent "I love you."
- Two fingers walking on the opposite palm toward the child can be used to communicate "I'll be back again."

Have fun practicing these hand signs with your child for these three messages and make sure that he or she understands the meanings. Then, when you come into the room after your first bathroom trip away from your waiting child, smile and give a thumbs up. Go rub or pat their back briefly, give the "I love you" and "I'll be back again" signs, and leave the room. **The use of hand signs helps the child understand this is not a time for conversation, which is an important element in the process.**

How often should you visit your child after tucking them in?

Although some sleep programs dictate specific minutes that you should wait in between visits, our suggestion is that you discern the anxiety level of your child and **visit soon enough that they will wait successfully**. Then you can gradually lengthen the intervals in between your visits, for example: two minutes, then four minutes, then maybe eight minutes. Stay with the child briefly, 30 seconds to one minute maximum, and don't use any words.

If your child is whimpering or almost asleep, simply wait outside of the bedroom. You'll want your child to know they can count on you, but give your child a little time to work at self-soothing when they cry. You can replace a fallen blanket or doll, but if your child throws it, wait until the next visit to give it back to them.



Note: Consider trading off nights with a spouse or partner, but whoever tucks the child in is the one who visits for that night. Consistency is calming and one key to success.

Reassure your child that you will continue to return until they fall asleep. On the visit in which you determine they are asleep, you can leave a little note or take a picture of them sleeping to show them the next morning. This builds trust that you continued to visit them as promised.

Ending bedtime struggles requires an upfront investment

This process may require quite an initial effort on the front end. As you are making this transition you may want to consider sitting near your child's room with a good book or quiet activity so that frequent visits are more convenient. The goal is that with plenty of encouragement and connection on your part, the child will learn to wait longer and longer until they can fall asleep on their own. This is a very effective strategy,

but expect that there will be fluctuations in your child's ability to fall asleep and, therefore, in the number of visits they may need.

I coached a couple to develop a plan including interval checking to help their daughter, Eve, at bedtime. One particular evening the mom knew that bedtime would be even more of a struggle because Eve had taken a nap during the day. The mom wisely accepted that fact, stayed calm, and checked on her daughter according to the plan.

She reported, "even though it... took a little longer for her to get down (to sleep), it was...*peaceful!*" As Eve practiced her peaceful waiting, she noticed her mom's reaction and said, "Mom, you're happy!" She had sensed her mom's deeper level of peace and had responded more calmly as well.

If a child wakes up early, have them stay on their regular naptime schedule. Don't add to the nap to compensate for the short night. If kids are tired long before their nap, engage them in downtime or a quiet activity to rest, but don't throw off their nap schedule.

What if my child wakes up in the night?

If your child wakes up in the middle of the night, depending on their age and situation, you can start the cycle of increasing interval visits over again (like at initial tuck-in) or just help your child get back to sleep. If you and your child are sleep-deprived and you're struggling to develop a routine, give yourself permission to get through the night by doing whatever is needed, and try again the next day.

Once you are established in a sleep pattern and routine try not to shift your approach by rocking or lying with the child. It can cause confusion by getting kids to sleep one way in the evening, and then another way if they wake during the night.

Prepare for needing the bathroom

When kids wake up at night they often state they need to go to the bathroom and ask for your help. They may be struggling to fall back asleep and have found a functional way to get some connection. Or, they truly do need to go to the bathroom. Either way, you can prepare ahead of time. You can practice having them get out of bed, go to the bathroom, and then get right back to bed on their own. For younger kids you can solve the problem by putting a [potty chair](#) in the bedroom.

Make a recording

For kids that are able to operate a simple device, you can provide a calming, vicarious experience of your presence by making a recording they can turn on by

themselves to get back to sleep. [Record your voice](#) singing quietly, speaking affirmations, or reading a story.

The “free pass” card

You can also make a [“free pass” card](#) with your child, which is good for a single visit to your room each night for a personal connection. Make it clear what one or two things they will get when they hand you their card (i.e. a hug/quick snuggle or a sip of water), and also what won't happen (i.e. giving in to a long series of requests). You can let kids know that if they come in *more* than once, they will be gently walked back to their room, without a word and without eye contact. Often, after trying it out a time or two, many kids start holding onto the card in case they may need it later. While waiting, they end up falling back to sleep. If the card has a picture of them getting the hug, it provides vicarious connection and reassurance.

Inspire with a reward system

Numerous children have benefited from a reward program for *not* using their visit ticket because they stayed in bed all night. Each morning that your child stays in bed all night and still has her ticket, she can get a sticker. Important: don't take stickers away if your child uses the ticket. Agree ahead of time on the number of stickers it takes to purchase a toy or fun activity. One highly anxious little girl gradually learned to forgo the special visit privilege and save her ticket. That ticket became a badge of bravery! She and her mom would celebrate her courage when she came out in the morning to proudly exchange it for a sticker for her chart.

“When working with older children, **problem solve** with them instead of mandating what will happen.”

Empower confidence in older kids, too

When working with older children, problem solve *with* them instead of mandating what will happen. This strengthens both confidence and connection. You might use a [family meeting](#) to talk about bedtime.

Discuss the natural impact of the conflict on everyone involved in chronic bedtime conflict by asking:

- “How does everyone feel by the end of the night?”
- “How does the stress at bedtime affect everyone's sleep?”
- “When it goes better, what does each person do that's helpful?”



Brainstorm ways to have peaceful, connected bedtimes. Collaboration with kids to set rewards or penalties will likely increase success at bedtime.

How I (Lynne) problem-solved bedtime struggles with my kids

Bedtime was a regular household challenge for Jim and me. Typically the kids were wired but I was fried, especially when Jim worked late. We had chronic conflict until everyone agreed that we didn't like ending the evening angry at each other and we wanted to do something about it.

We started by talking about the frustrations we wanted to solve. Together we forged a system of consequences for lateness or arguing, and rewards for getting into bed on time. Every minute a child was late translated into three minutes of earlier bedtime for him the next night. A week with five out of six respectful on-time nights earned each child a later bedtime with popcorn and a movie on the seventh night (usually Friday). It wasn't a flawless system, and sometimes there were still rough nights, but it was definitely much better. Our collaboration helped everyone to own the problem, while building creativity and conflict-resolution skills.



Empower independence as you decrease your involvement

One parent approached my husband, Jim, for guidance regarding her two boys, ages nine and 12, who often got wild and goofy at bedtime. The mother found herself giving constant reminders, telling them to “calm down” and “stay on task” during the bedtime routine. This was Jim’s response:

I’d suggest, based on what you’ve described, that your **high involvement in your kids’ bedtime process is, in the long run, counter-productive to the goal of the boys responsibly getting themselves to bed.** Your involvement is well-intended, but it’s clearly not working. Here’s why: Your kids have come to depend on *your* routine, *your* prompts and *your* tireless engagement until they finally go to sleep. All the weight of responsibility is yours and none is theirs. It’s time to give them more of that weight.

It may be difficult to undo the current routine because the boys have likely grown rather dependent on this approach, but **for your boys to take more responsibility you will need to be far less involved at bedtime.**

We suggest beginning with a question to the boys when all is calm; “How would you like bedtime to go, so that you can get up well-rested for the next day?” This is a question that has no one “right” answer. It’s about what they would like. Their answers will reveal what matters most to them. Once you know what that is, you can work with it by asking more guiding questions.

The most important thing here is not what your kids will say, but how you will respond. Can you guide them with helpful questions, the kind that really get them thinking and beginning to feel the weight of responsibility? Can you stay truly curious as they give answers different from what you’d expect or like? The safer kids feel to give their answers, argue, and solve, the safer they will feel to let down their defenses and be honest.

The key is to stay curious and to playfully (without sarcasm) help them test the wisdom of their answers with more questions. At some point if their answers are quite irrational, but they believe you are truly for them and not against them, you can ask, “Would you like to hear my ideas?” Then keep it short.

After asking a few questions and having some conversation about it, **hold the boys accountable to a plan.** Let them tell you how it will go. Ask them what they’ll need to help them stay on track towards their goal of getting to bed independently if they get off track. Then follow through. Have a fun meeting after a few days or a week to ask the boys “How’s it going? What’s better? What didn’t work? How could we improve our strategy?”





Reading these suggestions gave one of our coaching clients an epiphany: "I realized how I was the motor driving my kids' bedtime routine, which actually took the responsibility off of their shoulders. My kids are absolutely old enough to be taking more ownership of their bedtime. I sat down with them and we had a meeting about what they thought bedtime should look like in order to feel well-rested in the morning. We had a productive conversation and they had a lot of great ideas. They were not resistant at all and seemed happy to take more ownership. I think my own commanding demeanor at bedtime sent the message that they were not capable unless I kept everything on track. Bedtimes are not perfect but they are so much better!"

Involving your older children in the problem-solving process allows them to feel a sense of control and ownership. Instead of simply following rules, you are helping to build wisdom and thoughtfulness in your child's choices that will benefit them as they grow and mature.

Remember:

Your goal is to make bedtime the "dessert to your day." Rather than feel anxious or frustrated about the bedtime routine, think about how you can make bedtime a time of connection as you prepare their body - and yours!



HEART: Connected & Secure

Having a solid plan and implementing it at bedtime is an important part of your child's sense of security. However, these bedtime strategies are meant to be tools that exist as a part of a *meaningful, connected, and loving relationship* with the parent.

No matter how effective the *method* for getting your child to sleep, your love, care, and empathy for that child create the relational tone in which he or she will respond to these methods with trust.

Sometimes love, care, and empathy can be hard to come by at the end of a stressful day of parenting. If a child senses urgency and frustration in a parent's voice or body language, they may interpret it as, "Mom or Dad is tired of me. When they leave my room that way, I feel like they don't love me."

What emotions do you add to the bedtime struggles?

If you've read this far, you are probably committed to improving your bedtime challenges. Honest self-awareness is a great starting place, so consider asking yourself... "What do I bring to bedtime with my child?"

- Are you so *anxious* about getting your kids to bed and them staying there, that your anxiety makes it harder for them to settle down and sleep?
- Do you have chronic *resentment* at your kids for how tough they make bedtime?
- Do you feel *alone* in this tough challenge?
- Do you tend to bring leftover *stress* from your day into bedtime?

It was easy for me to write that list because I would have answered YES to each of those questions when my kids were young. Know that God's mercy and love for you is real, deep, and rich! He was with me in that difficult time, and He is with you in yours.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses... Let us then **approach God's throne of grace with confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to **help us in our time of need.**”
[Hebrews 4:15,16](#)

The affection and connection we will be discussing in this section are really difficult if we, as parents, are anxious. Our own anxiety about bedtime may show up in our child's behavior. If kids sense we are stressed, they will feel stressed too and struggle more to fall asleep. Providing the security they need may require us to first gain control of our own anxiety, so that we can approach bedtime with peacefulness and meaningful connection.

Try asking yourself these questions:

- How can I care for *myself* during the day to reduce my stress?

- What simple strategy could help me pause and refresh right before the bedtime routine?

- What do I need so I can engage with “contagious grace and peace” instead of angst?

Changing your goals can bring peace to bedtime

Sometimes a shift in your overall goal (away from “Get in bed and stay there!”) can make a big difference. We recently heard from Melanie, mom of Finn, age 3, who expressed a huge positive shift in her child's bedtime routine:

Our approach for a long time had been very focused on sleep skills and sleep rules, and our solutions were mainly oriented towards “sleep coaching” (interval checks, dark room, sound machine, etc.). But the evenings were often filled with frustration for my husband and me!

A couple of times a week our son, Finn, would take off running through the house and even *outside* for a good game of chase. Sometimes the power struggle was so intense we'd lock his door for a few minutes at a time to attempt to 'consequence' him into staying in his room. When he was finally calmer, one of us had to lay with him (sometimes for 30 minutes or more) until he fell asleep.

Finn's parents said a key shift in thinking happened during a coaching session when I asked, “Which is your highest value: Is it the convenience of a quick bedtime, or your child going to bed feeling connected to you?”

They said, “After our coaching session about sleep, rather than our main goal being ‘independently asleep by 8:00pm’ we shifted our goal to ‘going to sleep in a connected state, without assistance.’” The result was significant!

“We have **reduced bedtime related conflicts by almost 100%**. Our three-year-old now falls asleep every night in a connected state.”

Wow! How were they able to achieve this result?
Melanie shared:

My husband spends about 20-30 minutes playing with Finn for some intense connection prior to bedtime. We pray together and talk about God's peace. After we say goodnight, instead of going to our bedroom at the other side of the house (which left Finn quite anxious), my husband and I now have "office hours" in the office a few steps from his bedroom. We enjoy time together to talk, read, watch TV, or catch up on work, from 7:00 to 8:30/9:00 when he falls asleep. Almost every night, he comes into the office to tell us how much he loves us and then *independently returns to his room*.

Bedtimes now are definitely longer, and he rarely goes to sleep by our original goal of 8:00 p.m., but he almost always goes to sleep in a peaceful, connected state, which is our goal. Occasionally we lay with him to help him get to sleep, and I don't stress about it when I do. I feel confident that it is easing his bedtime anxiety, promoting our connection, and unlikely to still be occurring when he's 15 :) The evenings are filled with calm and connection for us and Finn, and my husband and I enjoy our "office hours."

We also talk most mornings about how he fell asleep and to encourage him in the *progress* he's making, very rarely talking about the challenges.

We feel like we've made the best adjustment for our family. It is definitely not following all of the sleep training rules (which I do have a high value of!) or achieving our once-ideal-outcome (asleep by 8:00 without any attention after 7:00). **I believe putting connection first will return so much more value than prioritizing sleep skills at any cost.** I'm a big believer in kids needing sleep, so to be relaxing on sleep skills in the promotion of connection, and *feeling great about it*, is a testament to the impact it is having on our family!

Like Melanie and her husband realized, shifting your goal away from moving quickly through the task of bedtime routine *toward* strengthening connection, can soothe the stress of a wound-up child at bedtime.

A connected child is a calm child. If you want to experience a more peaceful bedtime, connecting to the heart of your child and communicating, "You are loved," is vital. Ask yourself, "How can I *connect* or *empathize* with my child?" Later on in this ebook we'll take a deep dive into both of these elements, connection and empathy, with lots of practical ideas.

Different cultures have widely different perceptions of parent-child connection and when children should begin to sleep in their own beds. A mom in an Asian country told me, "Our 4-year-olds have now made the transition to their bedroom with a bit of encouragement, but independently. I can't imagine how much sleep our family would have lost if I had been committed to the Western cultural view that young children should sleep alone in their rooms."

No matter when you decide the time is right to guide your child toward independent sleeping, you can make sure a *primary goal* is to communicate messages of connection that set an encouraging "I'm for you, not against you" tone at bedtime:

- "I absolutely love you, no matter how you sleep."
- Single parents: "I'm going to sleep in my own bed, because we sleep so much more soundly that way."
- Married parents: "Married couples need to sleep together. That's very important for strong families, and we really want our family to be strong."
- "Let's figure out what helps you be a successful sleeper. Then we'll both get the rest that helps us feel good and have fun."
- "I'm confident we can figure this out together."

Strengthen joy-filled connection throughout the day

As I mentioned earlier, there are quite a few things a brain can't do well (such as gratitude and humor) when it is full of anxiety and fear. Affection and connection would also be high on that list. Make sure your child's day is filled with affection and connection to help decrease their anxiety. The feeling of, "I'm well-connected to a loving adult," builds a deeper sense of safety that overflows to bedtime.

One mom I was coaching said, "Since we've moved, my son has stopped sleeping through his nap, and he is screaming loudly and waking everyone up. We are all exhausted and no one is napping."

I suggested she make an extra effort to have fun with him and connect with him all morning, and then see how the nap went. She wrote to me several weeks later and said that after implementing this, he napped easily and peacefully and had done so ever since.

3 vital ingredients for connecting with small children

Young children *especially* require intentional positive attention during the day in order to feel more secure at bedtime. When we consciously give kids intense *positive* attention throughout the day, it meets their God-given need to bond with us and it builds connection.

There are three key ingredients to connection that kids thrive on:

- Fun and **joy**
- Affectionate **touch** and **eye contact**
- Attention to **details**

Here are a few [power-packed ideas](#) to maximize even brief efforts as you seek to strengthen this important connection:

- Draw a quick picture of your child with hearts all over it, and tuck it some place they'll find it.
- Make up a silly affectionate song.
- Affectionately touch a child's face. (Only do this if you know your child likes it.)
- Hold hands.
- Give hugs of varying intensities of intimacy, from a quick squeeze around the shoulders to a noisy, affectionate bear hug. You can even chase your child for a few seconds first, proclaiming, "I'm gonna get you - I need my Joey hug!"
- Find a fun reason to look intently into their eyes with a big smile. "Let me see those beautiful eyes!"

- Simply describe what your child is doing with a little detail as you walk by, "I see you are..."
- Describe a feature of your child and savor how God made them. What's your favorite feature? What different colored flecks are there in their eyes? Which freckle do you like best?



Build connection and security at bedtime

Connecting throughout the day is very helpful. But, let's be real: Sometimes your day with your children will be chaotic and stressful. It won't always hold the affection and connection you desire to give, or that your child needs to receive. Instead of feeling guilty and continuing in that frustrated, disconnected state, you can regroup with sincerity at bedtime.

One mom shared her story during the 2020 pandemic:

"These 'stay at home' days are not bringing the usual worn out little guys at the end of the day. Bedtime is longer and more rowdy, and I'm frazzled. I find myself giving less grace and more ultimatums."

After reading the [Discipline That Connects](#) book and working to implement the [Connected Families Framework](#) in her parenting, this mom experienced a turnaround at bedtime and a parenting win:

Last night as I walked up the stairs to our family bedtime routine I heard the cries of our broken hearted 4-year-old. He was lying on his bed just crying as we looked on. In *his viewpoint* we were teaming up against him as my husband and I sat, with arms crossed, shaking our heads at the 'tantrum.' I listened to the Holy Spirit and picked him up. I carried him like a baby while soothing him with a smile until we reached the old rocker in my room. I **rocked him and listened**. I didn't have

to say a word or even look at him. While we both looked in the same direction he calmly, without any help, explained what he was upset about. Bedtime that night was refreshingly meaningful. He curled up next to me and said, 'I love you mom' countless times before falling asleep.

When we connect well with our kids at bedtime, there's an added bonus beyond just an easier tuck-in. **Our [emotional tone at bedtime](#) affects how our kids sleep and how they integrate the memories of the day. This, in turn, can then impact how the following morning goes.** Especially if you've had a tough day together, do what you can to refresh yourself and then maximize your connection with your child at bedtime. They will then integrate the day's memories in a more positive way.

“Kids need to feel like their emotions are **valid**.”

More ideas to connect at bedtime

Here is a list of practical ideas to help make bedtime full of sweet connection, no matter how the day goes:

- “Kids usually want to talk at this time of night, and if you desire the talk as much as they do, it's magic.”
-Tina Feigal
- One dad told his boys at bedtime he would answer any question they had and it became a meaningful part of their bedtime routine.
- Find or make up connecting, rhythmic songs and incorporate your child's name when singing.
- Every young child I've ever tucked in has loved the [I.L.O.V.E.Y.O.U. Lullaby](#). I would touch the tip of their nose and their toes at the corresponding sections of the song with affection and joy in my eyes. It powerfully downloads the message, “I love you and delight in you.” Give it a try!
- Teach kids nightly self-identity statements, such as, “I am safe, I am loved, and God made me *just* the way He wanted me.” Watch the last 2 minutes of this [TEDtalk](#) for a powerful story about this idea.
- Leaving a reminder of yourself and your affection for your child can be very helpful. This could be a bracelet, your Bible, or even something that smells like you!
- Some young kids may feel more connected and secure in a sleeping bag or sleep tent in a corner of your room. Beliefs about whether kids sleep in their parents' room vary from culture to culture, and from family to family. As kids become more comfortable, you can decide to move their sleep spot gradually closer to their room.

One mom shared how her husband helped their daughter feel more connected with him at bedtime with a simple but powerful idea:

One of our daughters has a lot of anxiety around bedtime. One night I was reading stories to the girls before bed. My husband came in to say goodnight, and he had just showered after mowing the lawn. Our daughter said, “Daddy, you smell soooooo good!” He smiled, told her, “Thank you,” and kissed both girls goodnight. I continued with the stories. A few minutes later he came back with a [wool dryer ball](#) in his hand that he had sprayed with his cologne. He handed it to her and she gave a deep sigh, “Oh Daddy, thank you!” A few nights later she asked him to spray it again, as the scent had faded.

Validate your child's frustrations and fears at bedtime

Kids need to feel like their emotions are valid. They also need to know that you are actively listening to their feelings, instead of trying to control them. For example, your child might persist, “I'm not tired!!” What does your child hear when you reply, “Yes, you are tired. Now go to sleep!?” Perhaps the message the child might hear is: “You can't tune in to your body and what it needs, so I have to control it.” Instead, you could try communicating, “You don't have to sleep; just rest your body.”

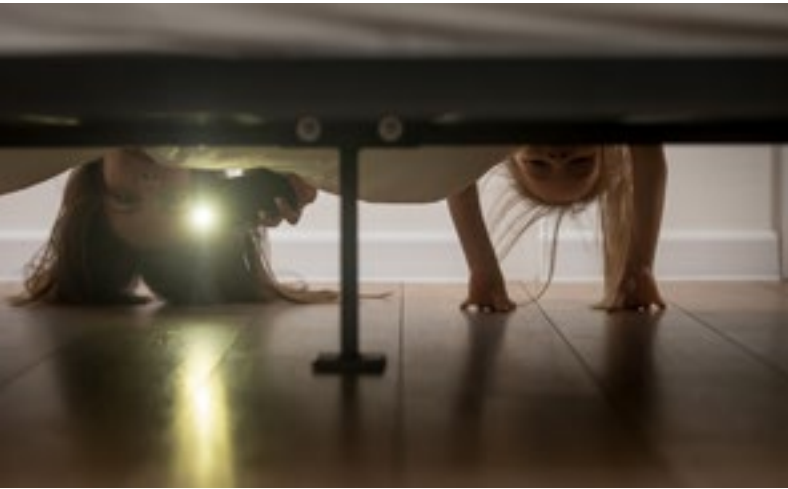


Empathize with the frustration

Children feel loved when adults really understand how frustrating bedtime is for their active bodies and minds. You can look into your child's eyes, smile, and sincerely say, “Bedtime is hard sometimes, isn't it? You have such an active body and mind. I love that about you, but it can be tough to settle down. You'll get there.”

When our kids were little we sometimes stomped off to bed, marching to a silly song we made up: “I hate bed,

I hate bed! It makes me want to throw up. I wish that I could grow up. I hate bed...." It helped us all to release some tension before the kids went to bed.



Empathize with the fears

Despite parents' best efforts to build security and confidence in kids, they can still have specific anxieties about bedtime. These might include someone climbing through their window or hiding under their bed. These are often a manifestation of [deeper general anxieties](#), like fear of being alone, or even anxiety about family stress that kids can't identify.

In general, if your child has persistent anxieties, a good strategy is to empathize well, but with a calm, loving face. That might sound like, "I know that being alone in a dark room can feel scary, and that's ok. I understand. Bedtime sometimes made me nervous when I was younger. But as you get older that scary feeling is going to grow smaller and smaller, until one day it will be *all gone*. Smile affectionately and say, "Look in my eyes, can you see that I'm not scared?"

When I [read this principle](#) ("look in my face and see that I'm not scared") it struck me that it is so much like Jesus. He [shares our tears](#) of grief, and he [rejoices with our joy](#). He [might even share our anger](#). But He's never afraid when we are; He always [reassures our fears](#). King David knew this. In one of David's [Psalms](#) about his fears, his comfort was in God's face. "Your face, LORD, I will seek." **Try to make sure your kids see a loving, calm face when they are afraid.**

Solve the issue of anxious demands at bedtime

Kari struggled with her intense and sensitive 3-year-old daughter, Abby, who made anxious bedtime demands to control her environment. These included, "Mommy, I want 5 hugs, 10 kisses on each cheek, and 5 butterfly kisses. Line up my stuffed animals in a straight line. No, no, no! My blanket is crooked! And it's *wrinkled!*!"

If Kari gave in to these demands, they continued. If she firmly denied these demands, Abby would wail hysterically and demand more the next time. This no-win situation often ended up leaving Kari feeling frustrated and trapped.

Sometimes children may struggle to identify what's wrong or put their feelings into words, especially when they are anxious or somehow feeling out of control inside. So they lock onto something that meets a superficial need and gives them a sense of control. They may even try to control *you* and *your* big emotions!

I coached Kari through three steps of problem-solving. If bedtime demands are a problem in your home, you may want to go through the same three steps.

1. Self-reflection: "How am I exasperating my child?"
I asked Kari to consider, "Are there ways I am being selfish or contributing to my child's demanding behavior?"

2. Empathize: "What does my child actually need right now?"

Once we, as parents, acknowledge and work through our own emotions, we can better focus on, "What does my child need right now?" Having empathy for your child's needs builds security and connection, and allows them to feel like they have a voice.

3. Give choices: "What options could we both be satisfied with?"

Finally, give choices that keep you in charge, but honor your child. It helps kids greatly to know what their options are, rather than just being forced to do what mom or dad says.

“Sometimes children may **struggle to identify** what's wrong or put their feelings into words.”

How Kari applied these 3 steps to Abby's bedtime struggles

After I coached Kari through this challenge, she looked inward and realized she was acting controlling due to judgments about Abby's demands. Once she realized her own selfishness, she was able to consider what Abby was feeling (anxiety) and what she needed (security and some sense of healthy power).

Kari determined to "[cast out fear with perfect love](#)" by making sure Abby felt delighted in. She gave Abby lots

of affection before getting into bed. Then, as she tucked her in, she held her daughter's face, looked into her eyes and smiled, saying, "You are loved."

After expressing sincere delight in her anxious daughter, Kari was able to confidently offer limited choices to Abby about her bedtime routine, which met Abby's need for healthy power. Kari's peaceful confidence helped Abby feel secure. Together they settled on a regular bedtime routine and Kari reported that:

Through this approach Abby has stopped demanding kisses in a certain way or having her blanket perfectly arranged. I kiss her goodnight on the forehead and tell her I love her as I leave and that's that. On the rare occasions when she gets anxious I will then pick her up and just hug and hold her for a minute, whispering to her, "You are loved," "You are safe," "You are my delight," She almost melts into me when she hears those words. It reassures her. I then can explain that she doesn't need to control the situation, and that we can work together to solve our challenges. We are in a much better place and bedtime remains full of love.

When kids start [making demands](#), these steps help them feel understood. This gives them some ownership for how things unfold. Healthy power reduces the anxiety and discouragement that can *trigger* more demands.



Set limits and discipline at bedtime in a way that deepens connection!

Parents often think that as soon as they discipline or set limits their child will resist, and resentment and disconnection is inevitable. You can see by Kari's story above that it's just not true! We have a [book](#) and [online](#)

[course](#) filled with effective strategies to leave you *more connected* to your child as you discipline.

In addition, setting reasonable limits around the bedtime routine can actually help kids feel *more secure*. The vital element is for parents to discipline in a way that meets their child's need to feel validated, loved, and delighted in, like Kari did. When parents are a loving authority and communicate "I'm truly for you, not against you," kids feel protected and cared for and they tend to thrive.

“Setting reasonable limits around the bedtime routine can actually **help kids feel more connected and secure**, if parents set limits while still meeting their child's need to feel validated, loved, and delighted in.”

Here are some thoughtful, "I'm for you," discipline strategies for bedtime:

1. **Do-over:** It can help a child to practice their bedtime routine in the middle of the day, when no one's tired or crabby. "You had a pretty hard time last night, so today before you watch a show or go outside, you can practice going to bed peacefully." This strengthens helpful brain pathways. When they are practicing, have fun, *affirm their success*, and talk about the natural impact of cooperating at bedtime. Then, when it's time for the real evening performance, remind your child of their dress-rehearsal success.
2. **Lose the privilege:** Whatever a child's current bedtime, it's a privilege compared to the earlier bedtime he might have. If kids continually challenge you about bedtime, an earlier bedtime may be called for, but what's important is *how you communicate that*. An exasperated, scowling, "That's enough! You're going to bed earlier tomorrow night!" is an obvious way to break connection.

Instead, have a conversation about this outside of bedtime in an "I'm for you" way. For example, "Do you think I get more crabby when I'm really tired at bedtime?" They will most certainly say yes. Then you can agree, smile, and explain that the same is true for kids. "If you really have trouble going to bed it probably means you're short on sleep, and need to go to bed earlier the next night."

Your child may associate an earlier bedtime with punishment. Make sure to express your true goal: a loving, connected bedtime routine, and lots of restorative sleep.

3. **Lose the reward:** As mentioned in the Inspire with a reward system section, you can set up a reward system for your child to earn a sticker if they stay in bed and don't use their "free pass" card. (See our discussion about a reward system on [page 16](#).) Or, in some other way that is very clear to both parent and child, they have a cooperative bedtime. Whatever the system is, *do not* start over at the beginning of the week or take away stickers for any reason! If your child came into your room and used her ticket, or didn't comply with the cooperative bedtime criteria, greet her in the morning with a smile and say, "Last night was a little tough, but I still love you *just as much!* I'll bet you'll get a sticker tonight, and you still have your three stickers!"
4. **Make it right:** Older kids who exhaust their parents with long, drawn-out bedtimes can make restitution and lighten their parents' load the next day by doing some extra chores. We told our kids that if they challenged us about bedtime and drew our energy away from our final cleaning for the day, we would leave the kitchen mess (or another mess) for them to clean the next day. Be sure to implement the consequence with a calm, loving approach. Consider joining in to help and connect even more.



Remember:

Your goal is to make bedtime the "dessert to your day." Rather than feel anxious or frustrated about the bedtime routine, think about how you can make bedtime a time of connection as you prepare their body - and yours!



SPIRIT: ***Loved and Protected By God***

So far we've covered:

- [BODY: CALM & REGULATED](#)
- [MIND: SETTLED](#)
- [HEART: CONNECTED & SECURE](#)

Now let's turn our thoughts to the fourth and final component which involves helping your child's spirit be reassured by God's love and protection.

In the Sound of Music, when the Von Trapp children all jumped out of bed during a thunderstorm and piled into Maria's room, she helped them focus on pleasant, happy things to ease their anxiety and transition back to bed:

"Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens,
Brown paper packages tied up with strings,
These are a few of my favorite things.
...I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don't feel so bad!"

It's a good strategy, but when our kids are anxious at bedtime, we have a beautiful opportunity to help them focus on much *better* things than roses and kittens. We can help them with an important area of their spiritual growth: experiencing God's love and presence when they need it most.

Build a rich heritage of faith at bedtime

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”
(Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

God commands us to make bedtime (when you lie down) a special time of teaching children about His love for them and these wonderful, wise commands.



See the spiritual opportunity in bedtime anxiety

Because of the chaos and stress that can be involved, it might be hard to imagine that bedtime could be an opportunity for spiritual growth in kids' lives. But, building their sense of God's care and protection at bedtime is not only possible, it's also part of what they *need* in order to sleep well. **This requires a big picture goal that goes beyond your short-term desire to get peace and quiet at the end of a long day.** The ultimate goal is helping kids understand that God's love is very present and very real.

When we are stressed and anxious it can be extremely difficult to experience God's love. You can view bedtime for your kids as an opportunity to **build a lifelong strength of knowing that God is loving and active when they are distressed and feeling alone;** that they can depend on *all* His promises.

Scriptures to comfort your anxious child

A great promise is [Isaiah 41:13](#), “For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

One parent shared how this scripture brought greater peace to various times of the day, including bedtime, “We memorized it as a family and when fears would bubble up, we would hold up our right hand and say it together. “The act of holding up their right hand was a helpful reminder that God promises to help them and holds their hands.”

“For I am the Lord your God,
who takes hold of your right
hand and says to you, **Do not
fear;** I will help you.”
Isaiah 41:13

Let's savor some of the helpful verses mentioned earlier:

- When you lie down, you will **not be afraid**; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet ([Prov 3:24](#)).
- **In vain** you rise early and stay up late, **toiling for food** to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves ([Psalm 127:2](#)).
- In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in **safety** ([Psalm 4:8](#)).
- He will not let your foot slip— he who **watches over you** will not slumber...([Psalm 121:3-4](#)).

Sarah shared how this became very practical at bedtime for her 8-year-old:

“Bedtime seemed to be a time that all of the worries and fears would bubble to the surface and make getting to sleep challenging for our daughter. I didn't want to dismiss her fears, which were very real to her. I would reassure her that she was safe and very loved. She would sometimes respond, ‘But I don't feel safe.’ Together we looked up [Psalm 4:8](#). Her eyes lit up as she saw that the Bible addressed a very real need in her heart. She wrote the verse on a piece of paper.

The act of writing it was helpful for her to memorize it as well. We hung it together on her wall next to her bed. On nights that she was struggling, she lay facing that paper and read or recited it, sometimes repeating it over and over. Rather than focusing on not being scared (which tends to make it worse), her mind shifted to the very real and applicable truth that God helped her lie down in peace and sleep.”

For younger kids, you can write a verse they like on a piece of paper and they could draw a picture to go with it, or you could make it into a song you sing together at bedtime.

Embrace the sensory expression of God's presence

Bedtime is a fantastic opportunity to make God's love and presence tangible for very young children who are concrete and experiential.

There is a Psalm that is actually a prophecy about Jesus as our King. We don't see much about what He looks like, but we learn that He loves *pleasant sensory experiences*. Share with your children that Jesus loves things that smell good, look beautiful, and sound beautiful.

All your robes are *fragrant* with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from *palaces adorned with ivory*, the *music* of the strings makes you glad. ([Psalm 45:8](#))

“Bedtime is a fantastic opportunity to make **God's love** and presence **tangible...**”

Fragrant

In Psalm 45 we find that our bridegroom, Jesus, smells really good! The Bible also talks about the aroma of Christ: “Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” ([Ephesians 5:2](#)). **The love of Christ has a pleasant aroma in the spiritual realm!**

You can help your child decide what smells remind them of love, because God is love and love has a beautiful smell. Consider allowing your child to sample some calming essential oil aromas like lavender or vanilla, and then use a diffuser (or perfume or cologne) to leave them with a pleasant smell at night. Smell is processed in a part of the brain that also processes emotions. That makes smell closely connected to our sense of emotional connection and security. (Other essential oil aromas that are considered calming are bergamot and rose.)

Since we inhale through the nose to smell something, try using the essential oil fragrance to help teach your child a calming inhale-hold-exhale breathing sequence. You can direct them to:

- Slowly breathe in the smell of God's love (through your nose)
- Hold on to the love as it fills you up (hold your breath for a few seconds)
- Slowly breathe out God's peace (exhale through your mouth)
- Every time you do that, it fills the room with more peace!

Beautiful

You can help your child choose a picture or poster of either a familiar place they love, a scene that looks beautiful and calming to them, or just a special picture of part of God's creation that they would want to have on their wall. Build an association between the picture and the Creator that makes beautiful places. Remind your child that the same Creator is also right there with them.

Musical

Stringed instruments also have a special ability to connect with our emotions. But whatever “nature sound” or music your child finds lovely is the most important. You can help your child choose a sound or style of music that they find beautiful and reminds them of the love of Jesus. Remind them of this section of [Psalm 42:8](#), “by day the Lord directs his love, *at night* his *song* is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.”

Combine all the senses as you describe God's wonderful love

Look your child in the eyes, smile at them, and say, “Can you sense the love between us right now? If you could see that love, what would it look like? What would it smell like? What would it sound like? The Bible tells us God is love, and that love stays in the room with you all night.”

A great resource for parents is [scripture-lullabies.com](#) which streams on all major sources. They also have designed a [teddy bear](#) with options for nature sounds, a heartbeat sound, or scripture lullabies. The ability to choose the sound is calming in and of itself because children have a sense of control when they can make choices. Encourage them to tune in to what their body needs to feel peaceful and choose the type of sound they need at the time.

A fine motor activity can be very calming for some kids before their bedtime routine, and the [Jesus Storybook Bible Coloring Book](#) is a great way to remind them that Jesus is with them always - even when they sleep.

Bible stories are a vital part of bedtime routines for many families. A calming, comforting book, for ages 1-9, based on Psalm 23, is [Found](#). Reading Bible stories might go smoothly at bedtime as you try to help kids relax into God's love for them... and it might *not!* Some kids struggle to settle down and listen. But no matter what, **it's important that the tone kids get when you put them to bed represents God's patient love for them.** Your tone might be an even more vivid lesson about God's unconditional love than the very best Bible story!

Pulling it all together: One mom's creative ideas that transformed bedtime!

One mom, Lauren, communicated the message, "I'm for you not against you, and I love and delight in you," loud and clear to her highly sensitive, anxious 4-year-old daughter with amazing results. When Lauren and her husband came for coaching, bedtime had been a source of extreme anxiety for all of them. Lauren stated,

"Emmy was like a bottomless pit of need and I would leave her room exasperated—both by her endless demands and by my lack of ability to secure peace for her. I felt like we were both stuck, writhing in misery, and longing for a confidence and connection just beyond our grasp."

In my coaching, I've seen that the [intermittent visiting principle](#) is helpful for nearly every child, but when Lauren tried it Emmy got so worked up at just the sight of her mom that Lauren knew she needed a different approach. We developed a plan that incorporated all the principles in this ebook. She helped her child have a calm body, a settled mind, a connected and secure heart, and a spirit that knew she was loved by God.

Calm body: Lauren went on a mission to provide calming sensory support in *abundance*. She taught Emmy to breathe in calming ways through the [Breathe Like a Bear](#) book and [Bunny Breaths](#). She purchased an essential oil diffuser, a [weighted blanket](#), and a [lavender bunny](#) that they heat up each night. She also bought fuzzy rugs and fluffy pillows to create a "comfort corner" for Emmy in her room.

Later in their process, one of the ways Lauren helped calm Emmy's body was with supplements* of a [probiotic](#) as well as using [fish oil](#) and [liquid magnesium](#) at night. They were about 10 days into the probiotic when her mom reported, "Emmy went from usually being compliant, but reluctant, with their bedtime routine, to announcing, 'I'm actually starting to like bedtime a little bit.' Wow, what a change!"

*Be sure to consult your child's doctor if you want to try any supplements to help your child.

Settled mind: Lauren got Emmy a desk in her room with coloring supplies and a journal so she could gradually wind down from the day while meeting her need for creative expression. She also provided a variety of interesting but calming things to focus on: a [calm jar](#), a Himalayan [salt lamp](#), [glowy stars](#) all around her bed and ceiling, and a [star nightlight](#).

Connected, secure heart: Meeting Emmy's intense need for connection was a key component of their

success. One of her favorite bedtime books, [The Invisible String](#), talks about "being connected by an invisible string of love." It's a wonderful book that will encourage your child to feel deep in their heart that you are always connected to each other. Lauren also bought a lamb that could record her voice telling Emmy how much she loves her.



Lauren had another really creative way to make her love and affection very real for Emmy.

"I keep a stack of printed pictures in my room of the two of us together, which I add to occasionally. After I say goodnight and close the door, I slide a picture of us under her door for one final peaceful connection, which she puts underneath her pillow. She uses her peaceful waiting time in her room to draw *me* a picture in return and slides it back underneath the door for me to put under *my* pillow."

Lauren set Emmy up to have everything she needed to wait peacefully for sleep, and then added the [reward system mentioned earlier](#). Emmy got a sticker each morning when she waited peacefully in her room and then went to sleep, with 5 stickers earning a choice of various activities or simple toy rewards. Her mom is consistently encouraging and never takes stickers away.

When it doesn't go as well, Lauren lovingly sets limits and holds Emmy accountable:

"We talk throughout the day about her 'peaceful waiting muscles' and how they are growing so big and strong and we pray together for Jesus to strengthen them even more. Initially, if she didn't use her 'muscles' then the first thing we did in the morning was have a do-over and review her peaceful waiting tools again. I would do a quick version of putting her to bed, leave her with a 5 minute sand timer to have her practice waiting just like she should in the nighttime, and then encourage her success. We did this less than 5 times, and she's now consistently staying in her room at night and falling asleep."



Loved by God: Emmy has a [teddy bear](#) that sings her scripture lullabies, and she loves and now also sleeps with [Why Do We Say Goodnight?](#) under her pillow. It teaches kids that God called the darkness good when He created it, and He watches over them at night.

Lauren shared the impact of all this intense effort:

“As we’ve started giving her tools to calm her at night, she’s starting to sleep longer. You can tell the difference in her behavior—her obedience is so much easier because she’s rested. We’ve put a lot of time and work into this, and it’s really started to pay off.

Now, even if it takes 45 minutes to an hour for her to fall asleep, she plays or colors contentedly in her room and puts herself to bed when she’s ready. I do always give her two pictures under her door so she knows I’ve ‘checked’ on her and she usually slides a coloring page that says ‘I love you’ on it underneath her door so she feels like she’s still communicating with us even though we’re not with her. We are amazed by her progress! It’s the beautiful, peaceful, bedtime connection we always hoped and prayed for!”

Lauren’s measures may seem extreme to some. But if this level of effort empowers a shift from both parent and child being exasperated and miserable, to being *confident*, *peaceful*, and *connected*, it’s well worth it!



FINAL THOUGHTS: *The lasting impact of bedtimes*

When bedtime was hurtful in the past for parents

A mom we coached, Katie, shared that she is working through hurtful memories she has from bedtimes when she was a child. "My mom communicated in a variety of ways that getting enough sleep was challenging and stressful. I was spanked in anger numerous times over the years for playing noisily and waking her up from a nap. 'Now that you woke me up there's *no way* I'll get back to sleep!' My mom also let me know that I was extremely difficult to get to sleep and this was frustrating to her." Katie believed these hurts contributed to her anxiety about sleep and bedtime issues with her own kids. Once Katie had this insight about herself she was better able to navigate these challenges at bedtime.

But it doesn't have to be that way! Bedtimes can have a wonderful, lasting impact on kids.

Finish bedtime with a prayer or blessing

Our pastor shared how he had regular bedtime prayers for his kids, based on [Numbers 6:24-26](#). He would gently place his hand on their foreheads and pray this blessing, as a nightly tradition, for years. Sometimes even now as young adults when they spend the night at their family home, they will ask him to pray it over them. It's a beautiful example of a meaningful bedtime prayer, and a great way to end your bedtime routine:

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace."

One mom uses this beautiful blessing at the close of each day:

"You are a precious child of God, made in His own image. Jesus loves you more than anything in the world and He always will, no matter what. So will I!"

A personal note: How bedtime started my love for music, and my love for God!

In closing, I want to share a personal story about bedtimes in my childhood home. One of my pleasant memories from childhood is singing together with my brother. He would bring his guitar into the bedroom that I shared with my little sister. We would croon Peter Paul and Mary songs, and all sorts of corny folk songs. I learned to harmonize well in order to avoid those high melody notes! That was the beginning of my love for music, which has been a significant gift in my life.

But even more important was the spiritual impact of bedtimes. My earliest memory from my childhood is when my grandfather died when I was five. This set off intense anxiety about death, eternity, and heaven. I laid in bed every night, desperately needing comfort. My father, who was raised in a no-nonsense home, was ready to be done with what he viewed as my "manipulative" behavior.

My mother, however, saw the very real angst in my eyes and responded with the love and compassion of Jesus. She stayed with me night after night helping me to process these difficult feelings of grief, confusion, and anxiety. I believe that my early intensity about spiritual things and how she handled it significantly influenced my future faith journey. As a young adult this was a key reason I chose to seek out a Bible study when I was in college and came to know Christ in a personal way.

How will your children remember bedtime?

My challenge to you today: What kind of memories will your children reflect back on about their bedtimes? If it's not what you would hope at this point, be encouraged—you can make changes now that will impact your children's hearts and faith for the rest of their lives! We've seen many parents make wonderful changes to bedtime in their family.

As a parent, your investment in love, safety, and connection with your child at this important time will yield a powerful and lasting legacy in your child's spirit.

If, like Katie, you are struggling with unpleasant memories from your own childhood bedtimes, or you are simply exhausted and frustrated about chaotic, stressful bedtimes in your home... know that Jesus is for you and He [intercedes](#) for you. Imagine Jesus saying these words over you (paraphrasing ours):

"I will bless you and keep you;
I will make my face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
I will turn my face toward you
and give you peace."

Bedtime is a powerful opportunity to *lead* your family with *grace*. May God's peace grow stronger and stronger in your bedtimes as you lean into his love for all of you!





RESOURCES MENTIONED

Author info

- [Lynne Jackson, OTR](#)
- [Christina Spaeth-Herrar, OTR](#)

Research sources

- [National Sleep Foundation](#)- Sleep Recommendation Times
- [National Institute of Health](#)- HPA Axis and Sleep
- [Healthline article](#)- How Does Cortisol Affect Your Sleep?
- [National Institute of General Medical Sciences](#)- What Are Circadian Rhythms?
- [Sleeping with Socks On](#)
- [National Center for Biotechnology Information](#)- How temperature affects sleep
- [Dr. Roberto Olivarda's Research](#)
- [Nighttime Fears in Children](#)
- [Heart Rate Variability Study](#)
- [Assessment of brief interventions for nighttime fears in preschool children](#)
- [Humor as Protective Measure Against Anxiety and Depression](#)
- [Clinical Psychology Review- Gratitude and Well-Being](#)
- [Dr. Harvey Karp- Happiest Baby](#)
- [Dr. Alan Greene on Sleep Disturbances](#)
- [Overnight Therapy? The Role of Sleep in Emotional Brain Processing](#)

Definitions

- [Arrhythmic](#)
- [Circadian Rhythm](#)
- [Connected Families Framework](#)

Apps/Videos

- [CalmConnect](#)
- [Sensory Input Techniques \(Lynne Jackson\)](#)
- [Developing a Growth Mindset](#)
- [I L.O.V.E. Y.O.U. Lullaby](#)
- [Self-Affirmation TEDtalk](#) (last two minutes)
- [What to Do About Things Kids are Scared of at Home](#) (podcast)
- [What to Do When Kids Go Crazy? Do a Do-Over!](#)

Books/Online Courses

- [Discipline That Connects](#)
- [Discipline That Connects with Your Child's Heart](#)
- [Why We Sleep](#)
- [Sleepless in America](#)
- [Raising Your Spirited Baby](#)
- [The Opposite of Worry](#)
- [Attachment Play](#)

Children's Books to Help Sleep

- [Your Fantastic, Elastic Brain](#)
- [Bubble Gum Brain](#)
- [Big Life Journal](#)
- [Found](#)
- [Jesus storybook coloring book](#)
- [Breathe Like a Bear](#)
- [Bunny Breaths](#)
- [The Invisible String](#)
- [Why Do We Say Goodnight](#)

Blog Posts

- [Food Before Bed: What to Offer Kids and What to Hold Back](#)
- [Roughhousing](#)
- [Sleep Hack: Keep Your Feet Outside Your Covers](#)
- [60 Creative Ways to Get Kids Moving and Laughing](#)
- [50 Self Regulation Activities to Empower Your Child to Calm](#)
- [How to Cultivate Healthy Screen Habits with Your Kids](#)
- [Benefits of Sleeping Naked](#)
- [Relaxation Script for Younger Children](#)
- [3 Breathing Exercises Calm Kids of All Ages](#)
- [Gratitude to Relieve Anxiety](#)
- [Teaching Gratitude](#)
- [One Way to Turn Bedtime Routines Around](#)
- [How to Make Family Meetings the Best Meetings](#)
- [How to Stop Attention-Seeking Behavior Before It Starts](#)
- [Got a Demanding Child? This Mom Figured Out What to Do](#)

Bible Verses

Old Testament

- [Numbers 6:24-26](#)
- [Psalm 4:8](#)
- [Psalm 27](#)
- [Psalm 42:8](#)
- [Psalm 45:8](#)
- [Psalm 121:3-4](#)
- [Psalm 127:2](#)
- [Prov 3:24](#)
- [Ecclesiastes 5:12](#)
- [Isaiah 41:13](#)

New Testament

- [Luke 10:17-21](#)
- [John 2:13-17](#)
- [John 14:27](#)
- [Romans 8:34](#)
- [Ephesians 5:2](#)
- [Philippians 4:8](#)
- [Hebrews 4:15,16](#)
- [James 1:17](#)
- [1 John 4:18](#)

Product List

- [weighted blanket](#)
- [Comfy Buddy](#)
- [Bunny Breaths](#)
- [Stuffed animals](#) with heartbeat
- [Zenimal](#)
- [wedge pillow](#)
- [sleep tent](#)
- [snuggle sheet](#)
- [lava lamp](#)
- [ceiling star night light](#)
- [Sleep Training Alarm Clock](#)
- [Sunrise/Sunset Alarm Clock](#)
- [Jooki Music Player](#)
- [Stuffed Animal](#) to record your voice
- [wool dryer ball](#) (to add scent to)
- [Scripture Lullabies](#)
- [Jesus storybook coloring book](#)
- [lavender bunny](#)
- [calm jar](#)
- [salt lamp](#)
- [glowy stars](#)
- [star nightlight](#)

Supplements

(If you are considering using supplements to help your child, be sure to first consult your child's doctor.)

- [powdered magnesium supplement](#)
- [Probiotic](#)
- [fish oil](#)
- [liquid magnesium](#)