

## Insecurity and Distractions

Many children are afraid of being alone in a dark room. According to Cliff Siegal, M.D., as quoted by Sarah Hutter in *I'm Not Tired!* (Working Mother, Sept. 1995), "It leaves them to their own imaginations, and it's easy for them to envision monsters in the closet or under the bed."

Your child could also be experiencing a bit of separation anxiety. Does she have a hard time going to daycare or the babysitters? She could be feeling some of that same worry when she has to leave you to go to bed at night.

The noise and activity level in the house at your child's bedtime may be distracting her from falling asleep. She may be afraid she is missing out, and will maintain, "I'm not tired!" In these circumstances, consider the following solutions:

1. Tackle fears. Talk to her about her fears and kindly explain that she is safe and you won't let anything happen to her. Let her keep her door open a crack, and keep the hall light on. According to Sarah Hutter in the article mentioned above, you should not offer to stay by her side until she falls asleep. Dr. Siegel warns this could make your child become dependent on your presence every night.
2. Set routines. Give your child at least half an hour to relax and get ready to go to bed. Comforting rituals include taking baths and reading bedtime stories. Hutter offers that "...predictability will increase your child's sense of security."
3. Establish a consistent bedtime. Once you choose a bedtime that will give your child enough sleep (11-12 hours is the typical amount of sleep needed by a 3-5-year-old), be sure to enforce it. All children benefit from a regular sleep schedule.

## Bedtime Rebellion and Desire for Extra Attention

Your child could be saying, "I'm not tired," in order to challenge your authority and practice his manipulation skills. Children have a strong desire for control as they get older. Or, your child could have a real need for more attention. Hutter quotes Dr. Siegel as saying, "If a child needs some extra attention from a parent, he's apt to stall sleep--because calling out to a parent and postponing bedtime are good ways of getting attention." If this is your situation, apply the following tactics.

1. Remind of the rules. Be kind but firm about bedtime. Don't get involved in arguments about why you think bedtime should be at 8:00 and why your child thinks it should be at 9:00. It is crucial to stick to the time you've set. According to Hutter, "If you frequently give in to your child's stalling tactics and let him stay up later, you're apt to find yourself caught in a nightly power struggle."
2. Offer rewards. You can encourage your child to get ready for bed by telling him that he can have an extra bedtime story if he is ready for bed by a certain time. Give the incentive of a special weekend outing if he is ready for bed on time all week. (If he continues to fight bedtime, however, you might consider taking away privileges.)
3. Give more attention. Help your child look forward to bedtime as a special time to be together. Read a second bedtime story or have a good talk. If he doesn't want you to leave when it is time for him to go to sleep, remind him that you will have more time together the next day.

## "I'm Really Not Tired!"

Kids fall asleep when their body temperatures drop. They wake up when their temperatures start to rise. If you try to put your child to bed before her temperature has dropped, she will be telling the truth when she says, "I'm not tired!"

You can change your child's sleep pattern (the process usually takes about two weeks) by waking her up fifteen minutes earlier each day. Jamie Whyte, MD, says, "By waking your child earlier, you'll be creating a small sleep deficit during the day. Your child will be tired and more apt to go to sleep earlier at night."

If it is also difficult to wake your child in the morning, "...establish a long and gentle wake-up routine," says Lynne Embry, Ph.D. Start an hour before your child really needs to get out of bed. Cover her with another blanket to raise her body temperature. Play music, and turn up the volume every fifteen minutes. Give her a glass of juice to raise her blood-sugar level.

Dr. Anthony J. LaPray, in *Help for Parents*, says bedtime resistance is caused by a desire to manipulate or get attention from parents. He says nagging, threatening, spanking, and scolding won't work. Even negative attention will be a reward to the child. "If you give a child attention or power," says Dr. LaPray, "the behavior will continue. If you damage the self-image, more serious problems will develop." Instead, Dr. LaPray says you should allow children to lie in bed and read or play quietly. Be sure to give praise when they cooperate at bedtime. According to Dr. LaPray, "If the issue of sleep loses its power to upset parents, children will get the sleep they need."

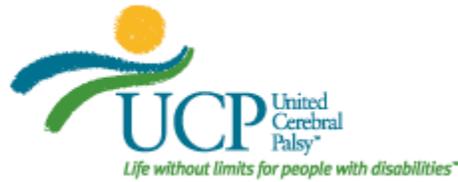
In *Answers: A Parents' Guidebook for Solving Problems*, Dr. Paul W. Robinson also supports the theory that even negative attention will inspire children to keep putting up a struggle at bedtime. He says, "When a child misbehaves, it is because such actions produce some positive satisfaction for him." Dr. Robinson is an advocate of the extinction method. This means that the misbehavior will stop if you remove the pay-off that resulted from the misbehavior in the past. Dr. Robinson says, "A child's desire to misbehave will fade when five to ten repeats of that behavior fail to produce a pay-off." If your child wails and whines when you put her to bed until you come back to read her one more story, or until you let her come back out to the TV room for an extra half-hour, you need to change your behavior if you ever hope to have your child respect her bedtime. If you stop responding in the way you have in the past, after five to ten times, your child will decide resisting bedtime is no longer worth the effort. It takes time, patience, and persistence, but if you use the extinction method consistently, it is one of the most effective methods for stopping misbehavior.

## Helpful tips for healthy sleep habits:

- \* Newborns do not have a set night/day schedule for the first several weeks of life. It is best for a newborn not to sleep longer than five hours at a time in the first five to six weeks as their small bodies need frequent feedings.
- \* Older babies and children should have a nap time and bedtime schedule.
- \* Start a quiet time, such as listening to quiet music or reading a book, 20 to 30 minutes before bedtime.
- \* After quiet time, follow a bedtime routine such as diaper change, going to the bathroom, brushing teeth, etc.
- \* Set a time limit for quiet time and the routine so it does not drag on and your child knows what to expect before bedtime.
- \* Say goodnight, turn off the light, and leave the room.
- \* Security objects, such as a special blanket or stuffed animal, can be a part of the bedtime routine.
- \* It is important for children to be put to bed awake so they learn to fall asleep themselves.
- \* Babies should not be put to bed with a bottle. It causes problems with tooth decay and ear infections.



Information obtained from:  
[www.practicalparent.org](http://www.practicalparent.org)  
[www.cincinnatichildrens.org](http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org)



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# Winning the Bedtime Battle



If you have a difficult time getting your child to go to bed at night, the first step is to figure out why your child says, "But I'm not tired!" Is he in need of more attention? Is he scared of the dark? Is he feeling the need to assert his independence? Or, the answer could be that he really isn't tired. Your child may have a natural inclination to be alert late at night. In order to reduce your child's resistance, think about his stage of maturation, his bedtime routine, and any important changes in his life, such as a divorce or death in the family.

**This brochure will address the bedtime battle you may be experiencing and will give helpful tips for healthy sleep habits.**

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