

## 6 Tips For Getting Your Children To Bed And Getting Them To Stay There

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**Situation:** Bedtime around our house is a disaster. I beg, I plead, I threaten, and I yell. By the time I finally get the kids settled for the night, I'm too tired to enjoy the rest of my evening. How can I get the kids to bed peacefully?

Welcome to the club! This is one of the most common parental concerns. Kids seem to have never-ending energy, which only goes into overdrive at the end of the day. At the same time, the parent's battery is draining fast, and getting the kids to bed becomes an obsessive, urgent (and sometimes desperate) need.

**Create a Routine:** Create a "Bedtime Chart." Use a large piece of poster board. Number and illustrate each step. For example: Put on PJs; Have snack; Brush teeth; Read five books; Go potty; Turn on night-light; Kisses and hugs; Go to sleep. Post the chart at child-eye level on the bedroom door. Allow your child to lead you through the step-by-step process. After a week or two, the routine will be set, and bedtime will flow smoothly.

**Change the pattern:** If your child is an independent reader, buy her a reading light. Allow her to read in bed with her special light for as long as she would like before turning out the light and going to bed. Remind her of her awakening time and suggest she get enough sleep to be well rested in the morning. At first, she may abuse this privilege and stay up too late. The next day, she'll be tired. Show a bit of sympathy, attribute her tiredness to staying up late, but give her no slack. Make her follow her normal daily routine. Don't lecture. Simply repeat the routine at bedtime and allow her to learn to monitor her own bedtime through experience. (As any parent knows, a few nights of sleep deprivation acts as a great motivator to crave an earlier bedtime!)

Don't fight it! Enjoy the special quiet, cuddly time that bedtime provides. Read in bed to your child, then turn out the light and snuggle until your child, and perhaps even you, are asleep. Don't feel guilty. In a flash, your child will be older and more mature, and you'll be longing for those extra cuddles.

**Question:** Okay. That's how you GET him in bed. How do you get him to STAY there? My child pops in and out of bed like a yo-yo and won't stay settled. I usually end up yelling at him, and then feeling guilty as cries himself to sleep.

It's usually a parent's ambivalence about bedtime routines that allows a child to try to negotiate a new privilege every night. Be clear and concise about your bedtime rules, and you'll find bedtime will be much more enjoyable.

That's the ticket! When you put your child to bed give him three "Get-Out-Of-Bed-Free" cards. These are simply tickets that you make out of cardboard. Let your child know that each time he gets out of bed, for whatever reason, he must give you one card. So, if he gets up for a drink of water, to go potty, to ask how many days 'til his birthday party, he needs to give you a card each time. When the cards are gone, he has to stay in bed. Let him know that if he gets up after all his cards are gone, he won't get ANY cards tomorrow night.

**Make it a ritual:** Create a very specific bedtime ritual that is loving and enjoyable. After you put a child to bed, take the time to read to him. After that, sing a song, or rub his back. When a child is in a sleepy, comfortable state, he'll be less likely to want to get out of bed. Let him know that he can enjoy this special time, provided he stays in bed when the routine is completed. If he fusses and gets out of bed afterwards, tell him he'll lose the privilege the following night. You may have to follow through on this. If you do, expect a major tantrum, but hold your ground. You'll only have to go through this once or twice for the message to get through loud and clear.

What's really happening? Consider the reason your child won't stay put in bed and solve the problem based on this reason. For instance, maybe your child isn't tired and is ready for a later bedtime, maybe he's hungry and needs a light pre-bedtime snack, or maybe he hasn't had enough time with you and is longing for some "cuddle time" before he settles down for the night.