

LADC Behavior Handout



Learn about ways to improve bedtime and increase your child's independence during sleep!



Bedtime Difficulties

Many children struggle with going to bed on their own or will wake up many times throughout the night, getting out of bed, or calling out to mom and dad. This handout will provide some strategies to help with those sleeping difficulties at home!

First, it is important to cover some basic aspects of sleeping, because if these aren't in place then the other interventions will not be as successful. First, make sure that your child has a consistent bedtime and wake time. This helps your child's biological clock to be set for sleeping purposes. Next, if you have not already done so, your child should have a bedtime routine. This routine should consist of relaxing, comfortable activities for about 30 minutes prior to bedtime. Sometimes, you might even need to start these calming activities one hour or more before bedtime to help them to begin winding down. Some common activities include taking a warm bath, reading a story together, listening to tranquil music, quiet activities, and brushing teeth. Avoid liquids, big meals, sugary snacks, rough/tumble play, TV, and video games during the last hour before bed.

Make sure your child's environmental conditions are appropriate. Is their room temperature comfortable for sleep? Is the room sufficiently dark? Is there sufficient air circulation? Is it quiet in the child's room where they sleep? Make sure to only reserve their bed for sleep and do not use it for timeouts or a place to play. You want your child to associate it with pleasant feelings of sleep!

Bedtime Interventions

If your child is used to having you in the room with them the entire time until they fall asleep, try some of these strategies below. The important thing to remember with any of these strategies is that you must consistently apply it for 10 days before you can decide if it is not working.

Bedtime Interventions

Fading Parental Presence

Fading parental presence is when the parent gradually moves their body away from the child every 3 to 7 nights. For example, the parent might start by sitting on the child's bed, rubbing their back until they fall asleep. Next, the parent may just sit next to them but not rub their back. Following that, the parent could choose to sit at the end of the bed. Next, the parent could move to sit in a chair by the bed. Slowly the parent could move the chair a little further away from the bed. Eventually you would move towards the parent sitting outside the door to being down the hallway. This helps the child to gradually get used to having the parent further and further away from them, resulting in them having to slowly develop self-soothing strategies.

The Sleep Fairy

Try using a positive reinforcement technique of sticker charts or the sleep fairy to increase your child's motivation to self-soothe at night. Explain to your child that if they are able to fall asleep quickly by themselves, the sleep fairy comes to little children and leaves something under their pillow for the morning! Remind them that the sleep fairy only can do it if they stay in bed and fall asleep on their own!

Sticker charts are also helpful to reinforce different aspects of the bedtime routine. Maybe your child fights brushing their teeth. You could use positive reinforcement to help motivate them through each step of the bedtime routine!

The "Excuse Me" Drill

The excuse me drill can be used in combination with fading parental presence or alone.

Step 1: Delay your child's bedtime by 15-30 minutes the first night

Step 2: Sit next to your child in the bed or sit wherever you normally do as you are helping them get to sleep.

Step 3: After about five minutes say, "Excuse me, I will be right back, I just need to _____" Come up with a really boring tasks you have to quickly do. Maybe you have to go to the bathroom. Maybe you have to quickly get your phone. Maybe you have to quickly ask dad something.

Step 4: Step out of the room. At first make the break really short, 10-15 seconds. When you come back into the room, give them lots of reinforcement for staying in their bed while you were gone! Resume what you typically do in the room, while getting them to sleep.

Step 5: Continue to walk in and out of your child's room with excuses. Always provide that reinforcement when you come back into the room and they are quiet!

Step 6: Gradually delay your time out of the room from 15 seconds to 30 seconds to a minute to 5 minutes and so forth. Don't make too much of a drastic change in the time you stay out of the room or it may cause problem behavior in your child. Make sure that you are leaving their room while they are awake for your little "trips" so that they learn to go to sleep without the adult's presence. If they are screaming or crying or trying to get out of bed, ignore their behavior and do not go back into the room until they are quiet. We delay the bedtime to make sure they are extra sleepy. Slowly fade their bedtime early to their original time as they become more successful!

Bedtime Pass Intervention

This intervention is great for children who constantly leave their bedroom after you have put them to bed or they call out to you with a variety of excuses.

Step 1: Sit down with your child and explain what the bedtime pass is. Explain that this will be a way to help them to learn to go to asleep on their own!

Step 2: Tell them about how many passes they will get a night. Depending on how many time your child calls out to you, start with 1 or 2 passes less than their average. So that might be 1 pass or 3 passes needed. You will gradually decrease the amount of passes overtime as they become more and more successful.

Step 3: Explain to them that when they use their pass, it needs to be for a short break for about 5 minutes or less. Once they decide to use the pass, they give the pass back to mom and dad. When they are all out of passes, they are no longer able to come out of their room or shout out to mom and dad!

Step 4: Create the pass with your child. You can use an already designed pass like the one below or you can hand-create the pass into something that your child is very interested in!

If your child does continue to get up to leave the room after their passes are already gone, guide them back into their room with minimal communication. You can say something like, "Your bedtime passes are all gone, you need to stay in your room." It is important to minimize contact when bringing them back to their room and do not give in to their request. If your child continues to scream out or try to communicate with you from their bed after they are all out of bedtime passes, just ignore any of their communication attempts. It is important to remember that sometimes the behavior will get worse before it gets better! They might yell louder or make up even more excuses but it is important for you to not give in! One mistake of giving in after their bedtime passes are gone will only make their bedtime problems worse! All of your hard efforts would be for nothing, so definitely make sure that you don't give in (even if they are waking up the other children)!

When your child does come out of their room or is yelling for you from their room, first ask them if they would like to use one of their bedtime passes. This helps them to know that it is their choice and to remind them that they will be losing one of their passes if they choose to. Additionally, it is important to remind them when they are using their last bedtime pass so that they know that after that break, they are no longer allowed to have any breaks or passes.

The last very important piece is to reward your child for being able to use the bedtime pass and stay in their room after that! They can earn stickers toward a sticker chart in the morning or points towards a small prize or activity. If they go to sleep without using all of their passes, make sure to give them even more reinforcement (e.g. 3 stickers instead of 1). Or allow them to exchange their leftover passes for immediate rewards in the morning (e.g. Ipad time)

The final piece to remember is that there needs to be consistency between all individuals involved in putting the child to sleep. If different parents put the child to bed on different nights, make sure that both of you are on the same page prior to starting! Don't forget about grandparents or babysitters!

