



Nighttime Parenting

Fostering Healthful Sleep

by Stephanie Dodd

According to the American Psychological Association, up to 70 percent of children experience sleep disturbances that affect their emotional and physical well-being.

Parents frequently awakened by a child's interrupted slumber typically are torn between the need to care for their own health and that of their child. The goal is to meet everyone's needs, so that adequate adult sleep doesn't feel like child neglect. Solutions are feasible if the parent is emotionally equipped to feel continuing empathy for their little one and secure in their choices for resolution, regardless of setbacks or delays.

Uncovering the real reasons that a child stays alert at bedtime or wakes during the night—such as inconsistent

timing of sleep cycles, excessive fatigue, insufficient physical activity, hunger, pain, anxieties, inadequate downtime or a desire for continued interaction with a parent—is the first step. With so many variables, frustration can impede the workings of parental intuition, which is key to the process, as is testing individual possible solutions long enough to assess the result and then confidently move forward.

Internal Calm

Expecting a child to feel so empowered that they can fall asleep on their own

is a good beginning. Lindsay Melda, of Atlanta, relates, "Our daughter used to wake us up by coming into our bed each night. Once I realized I was anxious about her sleeping alone in her room and was able to instead trust she was okay, she easily slept through the night, waking more rested. My own anxiety was causing her sleep disturbances."

Christine Gipple, of Oaklyn, New Jersey, a practitioner of non-violent communication, shares, "When my daughter is chatty at bedtime and I'm past ready for her to be in bed, I have to consciously pause, or I can snap at her, thus delaying bedtime. Granting myself just five minutes to reset myself and be present in the moment before I gently re-engage is critical to the outcome."

Such checking in with ourselves helps keep a parent thinking positively. Law of Attraction specialist Cassie Parks, of Denver, Colorado, advises, "When you focus on the feeling you desire once a child is peacefully asleep, rather than the feeling you want to move away from, your chances for success greatly increase." Noting how we envision nighttime unfolding or creating a nighttime vision board can help focus and maintain these feelings.

Releasing Stress

One method parents have successfully used is the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). It involves light tapping on specific points along the body's energy meridians, like the collarbone or between the eyebrows, often accompanied by attention to current thoughts and feelings, in order to restore a balanced feeling.

Karin Davidson, of Media, Pennsylvania, co-founder of the Meridian Tapping Techniques Association, says, "Including tapping with a supportive nighttime routine can be a godsend. It can relieve distress, whatever its source, increase feelings of security and promote a peaceful transition to sleep." In clinical studies from the National Institute for Integrative Healthcare, EFT has been shown to counter the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol,

IMPROVE FAMILY DYNAMICS WITH EFT

Dee Whitaker, a local certified EFT practitioner talked about her experiences working with children and parents with EFT. "I have found that tapping with parents and children both individually and together can greatly improve the individual and their relationship. I first learn what the child is experiencing, and develop an individualized script for each child. The script focuses on what is disturbing the child, it may be loss of sleep, family or school issues – even taking tests. We then work toward releasing the negative thoughts and beliefs that the child is holding. The key is working with a script that is very specific to the needs of the individual.

I have been invited to an elementary school to teach the teachers EFT. When the teachers used this with their class before a test, the scores were always higher than expected. Some children have difficulty taking tests because they become stressed and then have difficulty focusing on and comprehending the material.

EFT helps students reduce their stress level and improves their focus. And as is often the case, if a child is picking up on the stressful actions and scattered energy of a parent, I can work with the parent to help them identify the root causes of their stress and anxiety and then help them resolve those issues. This can make such a huge difference in the family dynamic and in the future success of the child."

contributing to decreased sleep disturbances.

Marissa Wolf, of The Woodlands, Texas, relates, "We moved here from San Diego when my son was 34 months old. He was acting out in ways I'd never seen before, mourning the loss of his routine. Within weeks after we started tapping before school and at night, he was back to his happy self. Last night, he simply went to bed and fell asleep. Now when I see his built-up emotions, I know we need to tap."

Nourished Rest

Good nutrition is also important to healthy sleep. According to Health Coach Sarah Outlaw, owner of the Natural Health Improvement Center of South Jersey and an advanced Nutrition Response Testing practitioner, "Children may be devoid of minerals because of the filtered water we drink. Supplementing with minerals like magnesium or enriching the diet with trace minerals, sea salt and mineral-rich bone broth will promote a healthy immune system, along with a nervous system programmed for sleep."

Outlaw also advises, "A whole foods diet is paramount to children's health and sleep ability. Parents should limit or eliminate artificial flavors, sweeteners and sugar; preferably at all times, but at least an hour before bedtime."

When a parent takes the time to plan each step toward their goal of optimum sleep and feels secure in following through, they can create a personalized and consistent bedtime routine that fosters a sense of safety for children that feel heard and tended to and know what to expect. Children that gain the ability to naturally develop sleep skills reap lifelong health benefits.

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