

No More Bedtime Battles

from *The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers & Preschoolers* (McGraw-Hill) by Elizabeth Pantley

We parents today have demanding schedules, and we juggle multiple tasks all day long. There's too much to do, and never enough time to do it. The bedtime routine often gets slotted as one more "thing to do" after which we can get on to yet another task on our never-ending to-do list.

I'd like to present you with a new way of looking at your child's bedtime routine: as a wonderful opportunity for a nightly ritual of quiet connection and bonding. Sort of like a forced savings account – a daily slice of time out of a busy day, given to you so that you can bask in the joys of parenthood and build the foundation for a close lifetime relationship. Pretty heady stuff, when you look at it this way, isn't it?

Simply said, you *must* get your child ready for bed each and every night. The time *will* be spent, one way or another. Would you like it to be peaceful, nurturing and bonding – or rushed and stressful? You have the power to set the tone of your evenings, so why not choose a pleasant routine? You will enjoy it more, and your child will no longer resist bedtime – won't that be marvelous!

Begin your routine earlier

If you are starting your child's bedtime routine fifteen or twenty minutes before you'd like him to be asleep, it will inevitably create problems. This provides barely enough time for the essentials, little time for pleasure, and no time at all for the inevitable dawdles and delays. As a parent, you're watching the clock move forward, stressing over the time, and trying to rush things along. Your child, who senses your tension and feels pressured, reacts by dawdling, or fashioning new requests that simply *must* be met, but of course, there's no time, so a meltdown occurs. Following this pattern, night after night, makes both parent and child dread bedtime, further increasing the stress, and making things even worse. So goes the cycle, from bad to worse, night after night.

The answer to avoiding all this turmoil is to allow plenty of time for the pre-bed routine. For most families this means allocating at least an hour from the time the process begins to lights out. While an hour or more may seem like a lot to spend on a bedtime routine, most families with struggles end up spending *more* time than this dealing with a fussy child who won't cooperate. And said fussy child gets so worked up that once in bed he's wide awake and takes a long time before nodding off.

Decide in advance on the best bedtime for your child, and then identify a specific time that you will begin the getting ready for bed routine. You may have to work backwards from this time to be sure that dinner and post-dinner activities are completed by the time you wish to start your pre-bed plan.

Once you understand the power of a long-enough routine to ward off the problems, and if you look at this time as an opportunity to spend some peaceful time connecting with your sweet child, then this hour can be something wonderful to look forward to each night.

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