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OH, FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP!

For many parents, putting the kids to bed is a daily nightmare. In theory, bedtime may be nine o'clock, but at 10:30 the children are still wandering around the house, asking for drinks, or going to the bathroom for the twentieth time. This routine may be accompanied by a good deal of arguing and screaming. With a little thought this kind of evening can be avoided.



SET A BEDTIME AND STICK TO IT

First and foremost, set a bedtime for the kids and stick to it as much as possible. This time may vary, of course, depending on whether it's a school night or a weekend, or whether it's during the school year or summertime. Let's assume that you have a nine-year-old, and you decide that nine o'clock will be the time to go to bed.

At 8:30 you set a timer for 30 minutes and tell the child that it's time to get ready for bed. This means that the youngster must do everything required to prepare for bed—on her own—and report to you. (If the child is two or three, you'll have to help him get ready.) If the child has completed all the necessary tasks you give her some praise and encouragement for a job well done. The time that is left between 8:30 and nine allows you to read a story or to simply sit and talk.

THE PAYOFF

This approach serves three purposes. It is an immediate reinforcer for the child's doing a good job of getting ready for bed. It is also a good opportunity for you to spend a little quiet time together, which most kids value quite a bit. And finally, these moments with you help the kids relax and get more in the mood for going to sleep. You certainly wouldn't want them running around and yelling right before they're supposed to hit the sack.

When nine o'clock rolls around, tuck the child in, kiss her goodnight, and leave the room. At this point some parents say, "How naïve you are; the kid is right behind me!" *Continued page 2*

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WHAT IF SHE WON'T STAY IN BED?

Some kids just can't seem to stay in bed after you tuck them in. You put them down and they get up. You try to go about your business. They are always coming up with some new reason for getting out of bed. What you should do about the problem is based on a basic principle: if a child gets out of bed, the longer she is out of bed and/or the longer she stays up, the more reinforcement she gets for this behavior. The only conclusion, therefore, is that you have to cut her off at the pass. It is no fun, but this is no time for wishful thinking—or ridiculous conversations about why she should stay in bed. What you do is park yourself in a chair in the doorway to her bedroom. Bring a good book if you want. Sit with your back to her and don't talk no matter what she says. If she gets out of bed and comes to you, take her gently by the arm or pick her up and put her back. If this routine keeps up, let her just sleep on the floor. After a few days or so, your child should stay in bed without much fuss.

WHEN "OK?" IS NOT OK

One of our 1-2-3 Magic trainers recently came up with this piece of advice. When asking a child to do something positive (like go to bed) or to stop doing something negative (like whining), some moms and dads routinely attach the word "OK?" to the end of their response. It sounds like this:



"It's time for bed now, honey. OK?"

"I want you to stop whining and use your big girl voice, OK?"

Is this good or bad? It's bad. Why?

First of all, there's no need for the extra comment. Requests should be kept simple, short and straightforward.

Second, the "OK?" is not a benign comment—it's a troublemaker. The "OK?" communicates to the child that the parent is anxious about whether or not the youngster is going to cooperate. Kids can sense this anxiety in their parent's voice immediately, even though the child may be only two or three years old. The "OK?" tells the child right away that the parent is vulnerable and unsure of herself or himself.

Third, the troublesome "OK?" implies that at this point the child has a choice in the matter. Now how many kids like to go to bed at night or actually want to stop whining? Not very many. So combine the kid's natural aversion to cooperating with the parent's uncertainty and what do you get? You get the potential for a bad scene complete with arguing, yelling and tantrums.

So next time you want a child to cooperate and you need to make a simple request, DO NOT put "OK?" on the end of it!

OK?

Oops!

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