LET'S GET SOME SLEEP!

Bedtime can be challenging for both parents and children. Parents are often tired after a long day at work, and may be feeling the stresses of other pressures as well. Children are usually reluctant to separate from their parents, even when they are tired, and are vulnerable to fears and concerns in the darkness of their bedrooms. It is easy to see how a parent's need for a little quiet time might run contrary to a child's need for attention and reassurance. It is no wonder, then, that bedtime becomes a battleground. In fact, bedtime is statistically the time when most child abuse occurs.

But this does not have to be the case. Learning a few skills and having a plan can make bedtime a much more relaxed time for everyone. Here are some simple guidelines to help you and your family establish better sleep habits.

- Try to keep bedtime consistent. It helps children prepare themselves if they are a little more sure when bedtime will be. You don't have to be rigid — there are exceptions to everything — but do try to be consistent.
- Avoid late evening rough housing. It is fun to roll and tumble, and it is important for children to experience this,

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but just before bedtime is not the best time for this activity. It makes it difficult for a child to settle down for sleeping.

- Turn off the television. Young children really don't need to be watching TV anyway, and having it on as they are trying to get ready for bed is a powerful attraction to stay out of bed. (Note: NEVER, NEVER, NEVER put a TV in a young child's room!)
- Establish a bedtime routine. This can include such things as a nice, warm bath, a healthy bedtime snack, tooth brushing, reading, saying prayers, hugs and cuddling, singing quiet songs or just talking about the day's events. It doesn't have to be elaborate, it shouldn't be rigid, but it should be fairly consistent.
- When bedtime comes, stick with it. If a child is rewarded for whining and crying by being allowed to rejoin the family circle, he or she is more likely to repeat this behavior. This does not mean you should ignore your child's cries. The child should be checked on, comforted and reassured, but it is best not to pick a child up or remove her from the sleeping quarters.
- If your child does not have a security object, consider introducing one. A "blankie" or special toy can help make the bedtime transition easier. Keep your cool! If your child cries or gets out of bed, remain calm. If you yell, threaten or spank, you run the risk of setting up a pattern of increased insecurity in the child.

For more information, contact the family life educators at 605-322-3660 or familylifeeducators@avera.org

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