

Bedtime Routine

For Children 2 to 10 years old

Predictable Preparation Steps Prior to Bedtime

1. **Clean-up as needed (toys, schools materials, etc.).** Use your obedience system for large, sustained tasks; help and praise your child's efforts. If your child dawdles or goes off-task stop helping and re-instruct your child to finish. Use warnings and Time-Outs for refusal to make effort.
2. **Change clothes.** Again, use your obedience system to require your child to change into pajamas, place dirty clothes in the hamper and put clean clothes away. Help as needed.
3. **Bedtime snack.** Once the chores are completed (clean-up and clothes changed), reinforce this work with a snack. Snacks also serve the purpose of calming the child and preventing the need for food after bedtime. Let this be a fun process with choices; children may be allowed to watch TV while eating their snack or listen to a story or any other quiet, passive activity you are comfortable with. Playing on the computer is discouraged at this time because this will activate the mind.
4. **Bathroom.** Now your child(ren) need to brush their teeth and try to urinate in the toilet. Insist that each child try to urinate, even if they say they "don't need to". This reduces trips to the bathroom after bedtime and can play a role in preventing wet beds.

Bedtime Steps

General conditions. Allow any soft toys a child wants in the bed. If the child desires illumination, make sure to provide that, either from a night light or a hall light. If the child is more comfortable with the door open, provide that also.

1. **Nurturance.** Hugs, kisses, sit quietly and chat briefly, and/or whatever style you and your child enjoy. These positive moments communicate to the child that the day is over, that he/she is loved, and that it is time for bed.
2. **Rehearsal.** For children just learning a bedtime routine, always ask the child, "Where do big boys/girls stay at night?" Praise the correct answer and provide it if the child fails to answer correctly.
3. **Rule violations.** If the child leaves the bed, the bedtime rule has been violated. Note that noise-making while in bed is ignorable and not considered a rule violation.
 - a. **First violation:** Allow a drink of water or toilet use, then recycle to steps 1 & 2.
 - b. **Second violation:** Allow a drink of water or toilet use, recycle to steps 1 & 2, plus warn the child that another violation will result in Time-Out in a chair placed in the hall.

- c. **Third violation:** Immediate Time-Out to hallway by the child's door. Position yourself within view of the child, usually at the end of the hallway. Appear to be reading or engaged in some other activity. At the end of the Time-Out period, when the child is quiet, approach the child and say, "Now, do you want to stay in Time-Out or go back to bed?" (offer your hand and wait for the child's response). If the child agrees to go back to bed or takes your hand, then recycle to Steps 1 & 2. Otherwise, start the Time-Out over with "OK, since you don't want to go to bed, you may sit here and Time-Out will start over." Then recycle the hallway chair Time-Out.
- d. **Refusal to remain in the hallway Chair Time-Out.** This is unlikely, since your therapist will not usually recommend a bedtime routine for a child who is still resisting chair Time-Outs. However, if the child does refuse to remain, march the child into bed, announce that you will have to hold the door shut until the Time-Out is over and treat the procedure as if it were the final room backup for refusal to remain on a Time-Out chair during the day. When the child is quiet and the Time-Out period is over, open the door and recycle to Steps 1 & 2.

Option: Some children need an extraordinary reinforcement system for following bedtime rules. If you and your therapist agree, you may make a chart for bedtime rule following. Back up your chart with small prizes or activity reinforcers you and your child select in advance. Usually such systems are not necessary after a few weeks, but could be left in place as long as you and your child both enjoy the process.

Adapted from: M.W. Roberts, Ph.D., Idaho State University