

Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



Getting your toddler to sleep...in *HER* bed.

Q: My 3 year old daughter wants to sleep in our bed. I want her to sleep in her bed. What do we do?

A: This is certainly a common issue for parents. Many children prefer to sleep with their parents in the “big bed”. In fact, it feels comfortable enough to many families that the family bed is simply a fact of life. This year both experts and lay people have debated the concept of the family bed. Fortunately, we do not need to worry about rolling over our toddlers and thus the concerns that many experts have about sleeping with newborns and young infants does not apply to sleeping with toddlers. In fact, it is usually the toddlers that are rolling over and kicking their parent that usually results in the parents wanting their children to sleep in their own bed.

When I approached this problem with my 3 year old, Alex, one of the first solutions was to provide him with his own “big boy” bed. While many children love their cribs or toddler beds, my son did not. Getting a “big boy” bed for Alex was the start of a new bedtime routine that has really taken the stress out of “bedtime”. If you are not ready at this time to obtain a regular bed for your child, you might consider adding special pillows or bedding to make your child’s bed more personal.

As to our bedtime routine, it has fallen into the following order: Bath-time followed by pajamas followed by two or three stories and finally the tooth brushing. There have been days when my son has resisted one or part of the routine. But eventually after several months of the same routine, he can anticipate what will happen next and is content to move to the next step. There have been days when Alex wanted to sleep in our bed, but I set up the boundary of having storytime only in his bed. Hence, I have been able to allow him to make a choice: he can sleep with Mommy and Daddy and get no story or he can sleep in his bed and get his regular two stories. He usually jumps out of our bed and dashes to his room for a bed-

time story. Once you have established a routine which will work for you child, stay consistent. Children who have regular bedtime routines are much easier to get to sleep and sleep well.

Sometimes my son would tell me that he is scared to sleep without Mommy and Daddy because the scary monsters would come and get him. I find it interesting how many toddlers are afraid of monsters and their fears are real. To address this fear, my son found a special stuffed friend, and he sleeps with a stuffed Pooh pillow. Sometimes he sleeps with other toys too. In addition, a night light, or sometimes just leaving the lights on until he fell asleep helped him feel more comfortable. Finally, sometimes either Mommy or Daddy would sleep beside him for 10 minutes, We have slowly weaned the time down to 1 - 2 minutes with a check in 10 minutes if he is not asleep. All of these steps take negotiating and listening to your child. I am sure you will find the right combination of steps to help your child reduce his/her bedtime fears.

Good luck with getting your child to sleep in her own bed. If you have any further questions or concerns, please consider discussing them with your pediatrician.

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Doc Talk, c/o PPCAMG,
2067 Vista Way #180, Vista, CA 92083
or call: (760) 945-3434 or fax: (760) 945-6761