

Ask Dr. Jim....

“Bedtimes are so stressful, I hate when it is time for our kids to go to bed...it’s always such a fight. Any tips? Thank you!”

First, thank you for the question. It is an important one as it is a well-known fact that sleep is essential for both our children’s physical health as well as their mental well-being. In this age of electronics and ever-increasing expectations placed on a family, “quiet” time seems lost.

First, I strongly recommend routines and rules...we hurriedly rush through so many things and seem to forget that as humans, we are creatures of habit that benefit from predictability. Our lives are often filled with so many options and opportunities that simple schedules and regularity are often ignored and replaced with “in the moment” events.

While the age of the child(ren) will have an impact on your routines, I like the following components for most children. See what you can put in place.

- be at home and not visiting friends or family by a set time
- homework must be completed before any electronics and back pack readied and put by the door
- lunches prepared and in fridge...parents and kids can do this together
- no electronics, including TV, after a set time
- set bedtimes based on need and not age (most children can understand this)
- baths or showers in the evening for junior high or younger students to physically slow up the systems
- reading or soft music (sorry...no heavy metal!) for 15 minutes before bedtime. This is a great time to spend with your child and both parents can share in this time. The story needs to be a settling story, not an action or violent story. For older children, they can read to you! If you are outnumbered by the number of children, simply set a schedule. They will look forward to it.
- yes, snuggling is fine, but if it is in the living room...no TV!
- tuck all kids in, regardless of age up to high school...even if they protest, they like it!

Finally, for some specific issues, here are some possible suggestions:

I get asked about kids wanting to sleep in parent’s room/bed. As this is an easy habit to form and then a tough one to break, I usually recommend that parents discourage this practice. Having snuggles, lying down in the child’s room for a few minutes, sitting in a chair in the child’s room until they fall asleep, use of a night light, parents or an older sibling retiring at the same time, use of a snack or treat after the child is ready for bedtime all have proved helpful in various situations.

Sweet dreams!