



# KIDZZZSLEEP

[Home](#)   [Patients](#)   [Professionals](#)   [Research](#)   [Contact Us](#)

<a href="#">About Us</a>
<a href="#">Patients</a>
<a href="#">Professionals</a>
<a href="#">Research</a>
<a href="#">Meet the Staff</a>
<a href="#">Publications</a>
<a href="#">Suggested Readings</a>
<a href="#">Media</a>
<a href="#">Contact Us</a>

## Helping Your Child Overcome Nighttime Fears

It is normal for children to have fears of the dark and of nighttime, and most children outgrow these fears at some point. If this is affecting your child's ability to get to and stay asleep, here are some of the following suggestions:

- Try to understand what it is that your child is afraid of. Be sure to listen to what she says and reassure her. Children have fears at different development stages. Younger children, especially, cannot always distinguish what is real from what they imagine. Don't ever dismiss or make fun of your child's fears because fears that seem silly to an adult may be very real to your child.
- It is also important that you not support or build up your child's fears. For example, if he/she is afraid of monsters on the floor, don't get out a broom and start sweeping them away! This tends to make the child feel that you believe there are monsters too! Your child may feel safer exploring her fantasies in the daytime, when she will feel more secure. In addition, if you have gotten yourself into a regular ritual of "clearing the monsters out of your child's room", she might come to expect this nightly attention and entertainment. After a few nights, she might be telling you that she is afraid of monsters, when in reality, she is enjoying your show!
- Help your child become attached to a security object that she can keep in bed with her. This often helps a child feel more relaxed through the night.
- No matter what your child seems to be afraid of, a night-light can help. If your child feels more comfortable with more light on and this does not prevent her from falling asleep, leave the light on! You can also try leaving the door to her bedroom open so she doesn't feel isolated from the rest of the family. Consider allowing your child to have a pet for nighttime company. Even a bedside fish tank may help. Sometimes, sharing a room with an older brother or sister can be reassuring, as long as the children do not disturb each other.
- Keep your child away from scary TV shows, videos or stories that may add to her fears.
- Build your child's self-confidence during the day. If she feels secure during the day, this can help her feel more secure at night.

night, too. Depending on how old she is and how well she can talk, you might try talking about what it was that bothered her the night before and how she could be less frightened the next night.

- If your child clings to you as you tuck her in for the night, or she calls out in fear, go back to her bed and ask her what is wrong. Then, you can say something like, "You are safe; we are here to make sure you stay safe. We'll make sure nothing happens to you so you can be snug in your bed all night long." Be sure you communicate the idea of safety over and over again.
- Don't encourage your child to get out of bed. Because you want her to learn to overcome her fears, she should stay in her bed and find out for herself that she really is safe. If you bring her into your room, or downstairs with you while you finish the dinner dishes, your message is that her bed isn't a safe place to be. It is much better for you to stay with her in her room than it is for her to join you.
- If your child is too frightened to stay in her room alone, it is okay to occasionally stay by her bed until she falls asleep. We don't recommend that you do this too frequently, or even two nights in a row, as she may come to depend on your presence.
- If your child is anxious about your leaving her, you can let her know that you will check on her frequently. Begin by briefly checking and reassuring her in 5 minutes, then 10 minutes, then 15 minutes, then 20 minutes, until she is asleep.
- Similarly, if your child wakes up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep because she is frightened, go to your child and reassure her. Repeat the message about being safe that you are there for her, and that she will be fine. If your child gets up in the middle of the night and comes into your room, take her right back and gently tuck her into bed. Again reassure her, but don't let her get up.
- If your child's sleep problems continue despite all your efforts, it may be simply that she has become dependent on your attention. At this point, it is time to step up your efforts in being firm and consistent, at the same time as you reassure her that she is safe in her bed.
- If your child's anxiety and fears continue, are severe, or are present during the day, consider taking your child for a psychological evaluation to identify and treat anxiety.