

Help Kids Put Worries to Bed

Excerpt from The Floppy Sleep Game Book, by Patti Teel
www.pattiteel.com

Worrying may interfere with a child's ability to fall asleep. If a worried child has not learned to relax his body and turn off negative thoughts, the stillness of bedtime can be particularly difficult. The uncomfortable sensations associated with worrying are likely to make a child avoid going to bed. He won't want to lie in bed with nothing to distract himself from a head full of worries and a body that reacts to them with discomfort.

It's important that children feel free to confide their worries so they don't go undetected. Sometimes older children don't want to burden their parents and keep their worries to themselves. By talking over worries, you may help your child realize that they are unfounded or blown out of proportion.

Visualization can be an effective tool to help deal with worries. For while visualization is imagining things as you would like them, worrying is negative visualization--focusing and imagining what is not wanted. When your children are worrying about something, ask them, "What does it feel like to imagine what you don't want?" Then, have them imagine things as they want them to be and ask which thought made them feel better.

Of course, sometimes children's worries are based on realistic concerns. Reassure your children as much as possible and discuss the situation in a manner that's appropriate for their age and developmental level. If children are worried about a robbery at night, tell them that you have strong locks, a dog, etc. When children are worried about something in the news, such as terrorist attacks, tell them about all the safety precautions that are being taken. Be sure to limit television exposure and discussions about frightening subjects in front of your children. After giving suggestions and encouragement, tell your child that it's time to put all worries away.

Ways to Put Worries to Bed:

Lock Away Worries in the Worry Box. Pretend you're holding the problem or worry in your hands. Fold it like a piece of clothing. Fold it again and again until it's very small. Now pretend to put it into a box and lock it. Make a ceremony out of putting the box away.

Help worries fly away. Have your children draw a picture or write down what is bothering them on a piece of paper. Fold it into a paper airplane. Send the paper airplane and the worries flying as far away as possible. Your child may wish to crumple up the paper airplane afterward.

Keep a Journal. Older children and teens may enjoy expressing their thoughts and listing their worries in a written journal before putting them away for the night.

Keep a treasure chest of dreams. During the day, help your child to find a box to decorate. Even better, find two boxes; one for yourself and one for your child. Each of you will be cutting out or drawing pictures to go into your box. Anything you desire can be placed into the box, (i.e. the treasure chest of dreams); pictures of places you want to visit, fun activities, or things you want to do or have. Anytime, during the day or night, you and your child can drop pictures into your respective "treasure chests." If your children are old enough, they can write down things they want to be, have, or achieve. You can always reach into the dream box and get an idea about a story or visualization to tell your child. Remind your children that the treasure chest is filled with wonderful things to think about as they drift off to sleep. Variation: If your child enjoys artistic activities, make a collage together and hang it on the bedroom wall. Each of you will cut out and draw pictures of places you want to go, things you want to do, achieve, or have. Best of all, you can always add to the collage as new desires arise. Tell your children stories where they face and conquer their worries and fears. (Some children like to be the "star," or main character of the stories that you tell, while others prefer to be a step removed and hear about another character that solves a similar dilemma.)

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Start to instill a sense of faith in a higher power. Depending on your belief system, you may wish to suggest that your children pray or ask their inner knowledge, guardian angel, guide, universal spirit, or God to help with a problem.

Instill appreciation and gratitude. It's not possible to be upset and worried while feeling appreciative. Share good things that happened during your day and have your child do the same. Depending on your beliefs, you may wish to encourage prayers of appreciation and thankfulness.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.