



# Monthly Parenting Tip from the ACFC

May 2020

## ***A to Z Bedtime Help\****

With schools being closed and parents working from home, routine schedules don't exist any longer. This can cause a lot of turmoil when it comes to bedtime. How you handle this problem depends on the child's goal. Many kids get out of bed at night just because they want extra attention or want to play more. With these kids, a logical consequence can be effective. However, some young children have a legitimate fear of sleeping alone that needs to be addressed (and not made worse by having them jump in bed with the parent every night or shaming them). In any case a little encouragement is also important.

**Here are a few tips for both situations:**

- Walk the child back to their room without getting angry or critical.
- **Use a choice:** "I see you're having trouble staying in bed tonight. Do you want to go back to bed on your own or would you like me to take you?"
- If the child is afraid, add: "Would you like me to lie down with you for a few minutes while you relax?" (If you have a good self-calming method you can offer to do that with them.)
- Before you leave you can ask, "Would you like me to leave a light on or turn it out?" (not the overhead, but a bathroom light or nightlight is okay.)
- Gentle "goodnight music" is also helpful for some children.
- If logical consequences are needed to help with basic bedtime procrastination, some possible choices you can give the child are: "*You can **either** stay in your bed until you get tired and fall asleep **or** you can start to bed 15 minutes earlier tomorrow so you can make up for lost sleep.*" or "*You may be getting overstimulated, so we'll need to stop watching TV and other screens tomorrow after dinner.*"
- One way of handling the old saw, "But I'm not sleepy!" can be: "I don't know if you are sleepy or not, and neither do you. The only way to really tell is to lie quietly in the dark for a while and see what your body tells you. Let's try this: You lie down for a little while and see how sleepy you feel, and I'll come back in ten minutes and check on you. If you are still not tired, you can get up and play quietly for another ten minutes and we'll try again." Most kids don't make it past the first ten minutes. Darkness, at least in the absence of fear or other stimulation (such as a power struggle with a parent) releases a hormone called melatonin that helps put us—children and adults alike—to sleep.
- One more idea: Instead of an "either-or" choice, you might try a "when-then" choice. For example: "**When** you have shown that you are able to stay in your bed all night, **then** we'll know you are ready to have a later bedtime." And finally a goodnight hug and *I love you*.

We cover this and other bedtime strategies in most of our online parenting classes. These classes are provided free-of-charge by the ACFC.

\* Excerpt from Active Parenting blog from Michael H. Popkin, PhD.

To learn more about how you can become an "active" parent, go to [vimeopro.com/activeparenting/acfc](https://vimeopro.com/activeparenting/acfc) and enter Access Code: ACFC150630 (case-sensitive) when prompted. You'll find a library of informative videos for parents

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