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Don't Make These 6 Mistakes When Your Child is Having Nightmares

By Vicki Durr

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It's Tuesday 2:00 a.m. and you are awakened by your 4-year old daughter's blood-curdling scream. A mother's worst fear of someone hurting her baby is racing through your mind. You quickly throw the blankets off and stumble down the hall to your child's bedroom.

As you enter her room she is huddled in a ball on her bed, blanket clutched tightly to her chest, and tears are streaming down her face. Her body is rigid, and her eyes are glued to the closet door. You go to her bedside and it's like hugging a board as you embrace her stiff body. Through her sobs she says, "Mommy, there's a monster in the closet and he is making a lot of noise. He's going to get me."

Sooner or later your child will have nightmares too. Knowing how to lovingly comfort your child and by dealing with the nightmares together you will save yourself from numerous sleepless nights. You and your child will get your necessary beauty sleep and be energized in the morning to begin your day completed rested.

In my 34 years of being actively involved with children, I have found stressed-out parents frantically searching for resources to help them raise happy, confident, and well-adjusted kids. Parenting is not something you do alone. Here are some things to avoid and simple games to play with your child to help them change their nightmares into 'sweet dreams.'

Bring your child to bed with you - This is very tempting to do in the middle of the night but making your bed the family bed is only a temporary fix and will make things worst in the long run.

Instead, have your child camp out on the floor next to your bed with their favorite pillow, blanket, or stuffed animal. Sleeping in your room will make your child feels safe knowing you are close, but also communicates boundaries. Teach your child these boundaries or limits and they will gradually want to return to their own room to sleep.

Tell them there is nothing to be afraid of - Reasoning with a scared child in the wee hours of the morning is futile. You're half asleep and your child's fears of the unknown are real. Strange noises,

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shadows, and the darkness of the night are the common causes of nightmares. Often times they are frozen stiff and can't move to go find you and that scares them even more.

To explain strange noises, take your child's hand and show them what is making the noise. Be sure to turn lights on as you go and also point out shadows that disappear when the lights are turned on. Another great way to explain shadows is to point out shadows during daylight and explain what is making the shadow. For example, his or her own shadow, trees, bushes, a toy, or the family dog.

A great game to play with your child during the day is to first blindfold them, then create noises. Your child needs to guess what the sounds are and where they are coming from. This not only helps them to identify typical household noises but also develops their sense of hearing.

Purchase a night light for your child's bedroom or leave a light on in another room such as the hallway or bathroom. Having more light will soften your child's frozen state and allow them to move about and come to find you. It also comforts them to know that they can see and no one will have the chance to come sneaking in their room.

Tell them that monsters aren't real and don't exist – A child's innocence and imagination are precious; both need to be handled with extra care so that you don't destroy them in any way, shape, or form.

The best way to handle monsters is to ask your child questions. What does the monster look like? Is the monster big or small? What color is the monster? Is the monster friendly? What does the monster want? How old do you think the monster is? Does the monster look like an animal or us? This shows your child that you believe their monster truly exists and encourages them to face their monster by painting a picture using their creative imagination. It draws you into their fantasy world and builds a strong, bonding relationship.

Once you have a clear picture of what the monster looks like, take your child's hand, turn on the lights, and find a squirt bottle of water. Give it to your child and then together go to where the bad monster lives and have your child squirt the monster. If it's a good monster, have your child take the monster a treat, toy, pillow, or blanket.

It's okay, Daddy got rid of the monster - This prevents your child from learning how to properly deal with their fears and creates some mistrust. Your child senses your disbelief in their story and because they did not witness the actual action to eliminate the monster, their fear of the unknown is intensified.

Tell your child to go back to bed - This level of fear is probably the simplest one to overcome. The mere fact that they are at your bedside indicates that their body is not a stiff board and they were brave enough to walk to your room.

Begin by asking what woke them up. Listen closely to their answer and then tell them how proud you are of them for being brave enough to come to your room. For example, "Daddy, there's a big monster under my bed." "Son, I'm extremely proud that you were brave enough to get out of bed to come and tell me about the big monster under your bed. Let's go meet and destroy this big monster together."

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As you are walking to his bedroom hand in hand, continue asking questions about the monster while turning on lights as you go. Find a flashlight that your child can use to look in other dark places and the squirt bottle of water to spray the monster under the bed.

Putting your child to bed in your room instead of theirs – This prolongs the issue and the sooner you gently guide your child to deal with their nightmare, the sooner you will all get a good night's sleep.

Establish a bedtime ritual by following the 3–steps below. This consistency will foster a safety net for your child and children feel secure when they know what to expect.

1. Give your child a flashlight to check under the bed, behind the dresser, and in the closet for any monsters.
2. Turn the bedroom light off and turn the hallway or bathroom light on. This will show your child that the nightlight, hallway, or bathroom's light bulb is not burned out.
3. Then play the listening game as the two of you cuddle on their bed and discuss the sounds you are both hearing.

Nightmares don't have to be the culprit for stealing your child's security, interrupting their imagination, or precious families sleep time. Playfully helping your child to deal with their fears of going to bed can be fun, exciting and challenging. You will gain a peace of mind to lovingly tuck your child into bed, kiss them goodnight, and wish them 'Sweet Dreams' and they will wake up the morning to tell you all about their sweet dreams using their creative imagination.

Vicki Durr publishes "Down Home News" a free newsletter that provides parenting tips and activities designed to bring families together through nurturing play. Subscribe at her Website at <http://www.seasonedhearts.com> and you are automatically entered in the Family Vacation Sweepstakes. Contact her at 303–725–7097 or mail to: requests@seasonedhearts.com

I come from a family of 8 siblings, have been married for 26 years, raised two healthy girls, and have been actively involved in the raising of numerous children.

Nightmares

By Dr. Barry Burns

Nightmares are the type of dream everyone fears and wants to avoid. By their nature, these dreams are fearful, but often they need to be faced. The mind may be presenting them to us in such a dramatic manner because we have ignored a message for a prolonged period of time and it's resorting to more drastic means to get our attention.

The truth is, many nightmares are actually gifts that we should be thankful for because they are trying to help us.

Avoidance is the wrong response. The strong emotions evoked by these intense dreams are cries for help, and like a baby crying in the night for attention ... they will not be denied. The longer you ignore

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them, the louder they will get! Therefore ignoring nightmares is not only the wrong response, it's impractical in that it will make them worse.

Sometimes the subconscious mind will work with your nightmares to bring resolutions without you being consciously aware of the entire process. But when nightmares become recurring, then it's a sign that your conscious attention is being sought.

It's more common to wake up in the middle of a nightmare than during a regular dream. It's also more common to remember a nightmare. This is, again, by design as a way of trying to get your attention.

The best way to get rid of a recurring nightmare is to deal with it - that is to deal with the issue it's presenting. It will take some courage, but here are some tips on how to do it:

- Rather than turning and shooting a monster or "bad guy" that is chasing you, it's better to turn and ask the aggressor how you can help it. Use such questions as "What is it you want to tell me," or "How can I help you help me?"
- Come up with solutions by asking other "cast members" in the dream what resolution they would like to see.
- Bring your Spiritual Guide into the dream and ask for his/her suggestions.

Nightmares may also be caused by trauma, psychiatric problems or drugs (both legal and illegal). In such cases the care of a health care professional should be sought immediately.

Dr. Barry Burns received his doctorate from the American Institute of Hypnotherapy. He studied Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Hypnosis and Dreams. Dr. Burns founded Wellspring Hypnotherapy, conducts seminars nationwide and is author of "Wide Awake," a book on dreams. For more on the meaning of dreams, visit:



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