

Bedtime Battles: Keeping Your Sanity when it's Time for "Lights Out"

Night after night it was the same thing.

"I'm scared"

"I'm hungry"

"I want a story"

We tried so hard to get our five year-old daughter to just go to bed when she was supposed to, but it was never easy. She always had something she "needed" after it was time to go to bed. It always seemed like every time we took care of the first request, there was another one waiting to take its place. We addressed her so-called fears by making sure she had her favorite "stuffie" with her when she went to bed. We later let her have a walkie-talkie in her room so that she could call on mom and dad if there was some ghost-busting that needed to be done or if there was a serious "monster" emergency. We had the other walkie-talkie in our room and used it to reassure her when she was scared. This actually worked quite well. We also had nights when we told her that we would check on her every 10 minutes to make sure she was safe. We would make sure she heard us when we checked on her but she was not allowed to speak to us or to ask for anything...to do so would mean no more checking.

When she was hungry we would offer her "after bedtime snacks. These consisted of snacks that we knew she didn't really like...rice cakes (unflavored of course), celery, raisins, or any kind of nasty-tasting cheese we had sitting around. These were the only things that were available and there was no negotiating. After a while, we changed the rule to say that if she uses her "after bedtime snack," then she forfeits her dessert the next night. "After bedtime snacks" suddenly came to a screeching halt.

The last of the bedtime battles we had to deal with was our daughter's nightly wish for a bedtime story. This one didn't bother me quite as much because it was a great opportunity to spend quality time together...we just needed to get her to ask for one before bedtime, not after. We made deal with her that each night she had a good bedtime (no "call-outs" or requests after bedtime) then mom or dad would read her a story or spend some other form of quality time together at bedtime the next night. In other words, a good bedtime one night meant quality time with mom and/or dad the next night at bedtime. We would spend about fifteen minutes reading, playing a game, or coloring then it would be lights out. Once the lights were out, she was no longer allowed to make requests of she would lose her "quality time" the next night. Her good bedtimes have been worth the extra fifteen minutes that she gets to stay up...and the quality time together has been a bonus for mom and dad as well as our daughter.

If your child is engaging you in frequent bedtime battles, then why not give these ideas a try. You may also be interested in utilizing a structured bedtime chart like the one on our sister site

www.behavior-contracts.com.