

Ep #9: Make Your Child's Bedtime Easier With This Simple Tool (Part 2)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Do you struggle getting your preschooler, toddler, or older kiddo into bed at night? Is bedtime a chore that you dread? Stay tuned for part two of our big kid bedtime series to learn how to make the process easy and delightful for the whole family.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*, the podcast that prepares you for parenthood. We have been loving hearing everyone's submissions of their baby roasts and their questions. And we're excited to premiere that at the end of this episode. So, after you listen to me, stay tuned for that.

You can definitely submit more. We love it. Just go to our website, HappyFamilyAfter.com, and on the right-hand side there's a gray tab that says, "Leave a Voicemail," just do that, and you and your baby might be featured on an upcoming episode.

Today, we're going to continue where we left off last week talking about toddler and big kid bedtimes. I think some of the mistakes that parents make when they're really trying their best to have a solid routine, to make the bedtime process enjoyable and fun and easy for everyone in the family, and how we can tweak that up to make it a simpler and more straightforward process.

So, just to recap, last week, we talked about the energy flow of the routine. What are the steps? Where are we getting caught up? Where are we running into issues? And how can we smooth that out in the bedtime routine process?

Now, you've got your bedtime routine down, that doesn't necessarily mean that your kiddo is going to say, "Bye, mom, bye dad, bye parents, bye friends, bye

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whoever. Let's go to sleep." They are probably still going to give you a hard time, and not to mention that they're going to drag that process out forever.

While you just get more and more frustrated. Like, "Why can't you just brush your teeth already?" So, by the time you're done with the routine, it's too late. Everyone's exhausted, everyone's gotten grumpy with each other, has fought with each other. Maybe you and the other parent are fighting over who has to do the bedtime routine, because it's so arduous and difficult.

How are we going to make that easier? I have a really, really simple tip... As with most things, it's simple, but it's not easy... that you can implement to make the process much smoother.

I actually made this on a video a while ago for my social media. And when I started working with the podcast production company, some of the people that work there have kiddos, and one of the women said to me, "I was trying to get a feel for who you are and your message, and things like that, for when we work on your podcast. I watched your video about bedtime, and I started implementing the tip you gave with my son." he's like four or five, "and it started working the first night. It was amazing."

That was so awesome. I just love hearing that. I love helping people and making their lives with their kids better. Not just for you, but also for your kiddo. I think there's also this assumption that anything we do to make something easier for ourselves we should feel guilty about because it's selfish.

But I will tell you that doing things like this, setting boundaries, implementing routines, doing the bedtime cut off that I'm about to tell you about, makes everything so much better for the kids, too. They love it. They love routines. They love predictability. And they love having a parent that's not frustrated and trying to get out of their room at bedtime. Because it's nine o'clock and they still have to clean up the kitchen, do some work emails, and try to get to sleep themselves.

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So, you have your bedtime routine; you have your steps, you're working through them, and even though you've tweaked it up so that there aren't any energy leaks or bottlenecks or problems, the kids are still stalling and dragging out the process. That's because they don't want you to leave. They don't want to go to bed. I mean, even when we're exhausted, it can be so hard to put down our fun things or our work or the things that are keeping us busy, and actually commit to going to sleep.

The same is true for kids, especially when they want to spend time with you. So, what a lot of people do is they say, "The bedtime routine is okay. We brush teeth, we do pajamas, we go potty one last time. Then, we read two books or three books or whatever. You pick the books, or I pick the books, or you pick one and I pick one, and then that's when you go to bed."

So, the routine is a number of steps, and when we reach the end of the steps, that's when it's bedtime. I want to flip that on its head and do the opposite. You can have your steps, that's great. But we want to end bedtime at a particular time, even if we're not done with the routine.

Let's say it's eight o'clock; you have a four- or five-year-old who's going to bed at eight o'clock. Lights out is eight o'clock. I leave your room at eight o'clock. And what that means is, "If we haven't read two books, sorry, it's eight o'clock. I'm leaving your room. It's time for you to go to sleep."

"If you spent an hour dancing around, brushing your teeth, or whatever, 15 minutes dancing around brushing your teeth, that's fine. You had fun with that. I'm glad you chose that. And now, we don't have as much time to do books." And that's fine. It's not a punishment. It's a life lesson.

Honestly, it's kids learning time management as much as adults. Right now, what they've learned is 'if I drag this process out as long as possible, I can get more time with mom and dad, and I don't have to go to bed.' But once they figure out the dancing around, instead of brushing their teeth, means they don't get to read as many books, it's a natural result of their actions.

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They will start to say, “Oh, wow, if I brush my teeth faster, then maybe I get to read three books. Maybe I get to read four books. Maybe I get to read books for a half hour, if I get through the beginning part of the routine so quickly that it's only 7:30 when I'm getting tucked in.”

On the flip side, for you, the parents, you're not getting exasperated with them for dancing around when they're brushing their teeth. Because you know that when that clock strikes eight, you're walking out of that room. It's like, “Great, fine. You sit here and dance around while you brush your teeth. I don't really care. I know that I'm leaving your room at eight o'clock.”

So, that's where it can make a huge difference in the overall energy, the feelings, the mental response to what's happening. It's not a battle. We're not fighting over it. If they say, “Oh, I want to read another book,” and you say, “Great. It's 7:50. We can read another book for 10 minutes.” That's fantastic. Everybody gets to do that, and everybody gets to enjoy it.

The kids have learned that that's how it works. Because we can explain it to them until we're blue in the face. But until it actually happens, they're not going to start making those connections, that ‘dancing around while brushing my teeth means that I don't get to read as many books.’

Now, I recommend having some kind of really clear signal as well, for what time bedtime is. You might set a timer, you might have an alarm go off at eight o'clock, or you might get one of those special color changing clocks that they make for kids. Which I think can be really useful, not only for showing them what time they can get up in the morning, but also for, “Okay, now it's turning yellow, that means you have 10 minutes until lights out. Okay, now it's red,” or whatever time, “and that means it's time for lights out. That means I'm leaving.”

The first couple of times you do this, they're going to give you a hard time about it, especially if they lost out on some book time or whatever. And this is where you have to hold the line and say, “No, I'm saying good night. I'm giving you a kiss. That's it.” They may resist and they may fight it.

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But the more you maintain that boundary without getting upset, without getting mad, without yelling and screaming and saying you're going to do all these crazy punishments that you're not actually going to do; like never let them watch TV again, or never read books with them again. You just have to be calm and say, "No, it's eight o'clock, it's bedtime. Tomorrow, we'll try again. And we'll be able to read some more books."

Do not go past that cut off. And listen, if you have a kid who's really dragging out bedtime and really giving you a hard time, maybe you need to ease them into it. Maybe the light needs to change at 8:15 or 8:30 for a night or two until they get used to the light system. Then you start pulling it up. Then, it's eight o'clock. Now we say, "Okay, now it's bedtime. Look at you. We read three books. We read four books. Now I'm leaving. It's time to go."

So, you show them that the reward for moving through the routine quickly is that they get to do the enjoyable stuff that you both want to do, while you yourself are not getting frustrated and exhausted and exasperated and wrung out. Because you're like, "Oh my God, it's 8:45, and we still have not read our two books."

Also, if your routine is that they brush their teeth last or whatever, and there's a night where they don't end up doing that because the routine took so long. It's not the end of the world to just let them go to sleep without it; one time, two times, whatever. You need to show them that the boundary is the boundary. I mean, maybe they're going to sleep in their clothes from the day because they didn't want to change into their pajamas. That's fine.

You are showing them, 'nope, when the clock changes at eight o'clock, that's when I'm leaving.' Now, I've never had that happen. I have implemented this strategy so many times, and I have never had it happen that the kids do not get through the important parts of the routine, like changing into pajamas, brushing teeth, going potty, whatever.

But I just want you to know that that is an okay thing to happen when we are establishing a boundary. I also want to mention here that, of course, they're

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going to try to ask you a million questions after they go to bed. They're going to try to stall. They're going to say, "I need water. I need a tissue. I want to say goodnight one more time." So, it's important that before you do the bedtime cut-off, before you leave the room as part of the routine, you make sure that they have everything that they could possibly need.

Do they take a sippy cup of water into their room with them? Do they need tissues? Whatever they need. Do they need to go to the bathroom one last time? Whatever they need, you're doing all of those things before the cut-off. So, make sure that all of that is getting done so that you have absolutely no reason to interact with them after the bedtime cut-off. Because at that time, we're done interacting with you.

And they're tricky. They're going to tell you, "Oh, I just want one more hug. One more kiss." "Okay, great. We're not doing that right now. But tomorrow, we're going to build in lots of extra time for all the hugs and kisses that you want. Because we want you to have those, and we love them too. But we're not doing them after the bedtime cut off." That's it.

Act like you're a robot that has been programmed to shut down at 8pm, and that's what time you're shutting down. That's it. There's no way to turn the robot back on. Your programming says that you are not going to do that. Does the robot get upset that somebody tries to turn it on? No, you're just like, "Nope. Tomorrow, we'll make sure to have lots of hugs and kisses. We can have lots of hugs and kisses as soon as you wake up in the morning, as soon as that clock turns green and is ready to go. But tonight, we are done."

And that is how we're going to make the bedtime process smoother, easier, more enjoyable, more delightful for the whole family. We're not rushing them to get out of the bath, because we know they're going to stall on the teeth brushing. They can take as long as they want in the bath. We're not getting frustrated that they don't want to put pajamas on, because they're just eating into their own time of their enjoyable activities.

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You get to leave that room when you get to leave that room, no matter what. Kids are smart. They will pick up on this very quickly and start figuring out how they need to do things in order to make the bedtime process great for them as well. When the reward is that they get more books to read, or more time with you, or more hugs and kisses, or more songs, they're going to learn really quickly how to get that.

So, don't worry that this is going to be difficult or you're going to have to be like a drill sergeant. You may have to maintain that boundary for a couple of nights, and it might be a little bit challenging, but if you do it when you get through on the other side, everything is going to be so much better for everyone.

Hi Devon, I just wanted to share my latest baby roast. So for context, a couple of years ago, me and my husband we pulled out all the stops for a trip to Iceland in an attempt to see the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. We drove to rural Iceland, we planned the trip in Winter, stayed in a tiny cabin in the middle of nowhere. We did absolutely everything to maximize our chances of seeing them, and we did not see them.

Fast forward 4 years and as you might be aware, there was speculation recently that the lights would be visible in a one in a lifetime opportunity, from right here in the UK. Well, with my pregnancy brain, I forgot about the speculation, went to bed riddled with indigestion, completely exhausted, feeling sorry for myself at 8pm on Friday evening, obviously forgetting to stay up and keep a look out.

I woke up the following morning to what can only be described as an influx of text messages, updates, photos on social media, from what was apparently every single person in the UK who had seen the lights, because they were visible from the tiny town that I live in. They would have been visible from my window.

So there I was, lying in bed still exhausted, drained of all life and energy despite having a mammoth sleep, with not only crippling heartburn and indigestion, but the crippling realisation that I had missed out on this once in a lifetime

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experience, thanks to my baby. I will absolutely make sure she's aware of this at every opportunity for years to come.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you haven't already, I would really appreciate if you could share the podcast with others who you think would benefit. Leave a rating and review to let me know what you think. It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback, so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value.

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Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.