

## **LIMIT SETTING SLEEP DISORDER**

### ***Definition:***

Limit setting disorder occurs when the parents or guardians of the child are unable to establish appropriate sleep behaviors and enforce bedtime limits for the child. It results in the child refusing or stalling bedtime. When limits are not set and enforced or are only enforced sporadically sleep will be delayed and may not be enough to meet the child's sleep needs. This may result in behavioral problems during the day due to inadequate sleep time.

The child may use a number of methods to resist limit setting that are often creative. Some of these stall tactics include crying, outbursts, asking question after question, throwing objects, making unnecessary trips to the bathroom, asking for a drink or one more hug and saying that they have something important to tell you. Attempts to return the child to bed may result in behavioral outbursts.

### ***Prevalence:***

Limit setting disorder is more common in children who are fully ambulatory and have developed language skills. It typically begins after the age of two.

### ***Treatment of Limit Setting Disorder:***

For a child with limit setting disorder, it is essential to establish a nightly routine prior to bed, a consistent bedtime and encourage good sleep hygiene. Parents should ignore complaints or protests at bedtime. If the child is upset or crying, the child should be checked on briefly and returned to bed if necessary. Providing a transitional object, such as a blanket, doll or stuffed animal may be helpful. It is important to be consistent and firm when responding to delays. "Giving in" will only encourage the behavior.

### ***Children thrive on routine:***

Establishing a nightly routine that is consistent is helpful for treating and preventing the most common childhood behavioral sleep problems. Bedtime routines help your child to relax and may include the following:

1. Eat a light snack.
2. Take a bath and brush teeth.
3. Put on pajamas.
4. Read a story. (Spending quality time with your child prior to bed is critical to help your child relax and comfortably transition to bed.)
5. Put your child to bed.
6. Say goodnight and leave the room.

### *Optimizing sleep hygiene in children:*

1. Bedtime should occur at the same time each night.
2. Bedtime rituals should last no more than 30 minutes. They should be a positive experience without the use of television, computer or video games. Your child's favorite relaxing and non-stimulating activities, like reading, should immediately precede bedtime.
3. The bedtime environment (e.g. light and temperature) should be kept consistent all night long.
4. Big meals should be avoided within 4 hours of bedtime. A light snack is OK.
5. Avoid giving children caffeinated products, including cocoa, less than 6 hours before bedtime.
6. Exercise can promote good sleep, but not within 2 hours of bedtime.
7. Keep the bedroom dark. If necessary, use a small and dim nightlight. Expose your child to natural sunlight soon after awakening in the morning.
8. Keep the noise level low.
9. A firm and consistent approach to a stall tactic will help avoid reinforcing the behavior. If your child needs to use the bathroom, send him by himself or herself. This limits more contact with you. Don't give in to requests for one more kiss, another story, a drink, a tissue, etc.
10. Keep the TV out of your child's bedroom.
11. Children should sleep only in their own bed. Co-sleeping not only promotes poor sleep hygiene, but also increases the risk of suffocation, strangulation and SIDS in children.
12. Children should be encouraged to fall asleep on their own. Children who are able to fall asleep on their own are more likely to maintain sleep through the night or fall back to sleep if they awaken.
13. Avoid going into your child's room if they wake up at night, unless they are sick or clearly require assistance. It is important send a consistent message that they can and are expected to fall asleep on their own. If you must enter your child's room, do not turn on the lights or remove him or her from bed unless it is absolutely necessary.
14. Except for younger children who need naps, avoid naps during the day.