

A Clinical Treatment Guide to 10 Common Pediatric Behavioral Problems

Night Waking

(The Cipani Proximity-fading Method)



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Night waking (The Cipani Proximity-fading Method)

1. *If your child is not initially falling asleep in their own bed without you, that could contribute to the difficulty.*

If you allow your young child to fall asleep on the couch next to you, that is setting up the “going to sleep” condition as one which requires your presence. You may need to start putting your child in their own bed (i.e., to fall asleep) as a later part of this program (once tumultuous night wakings have been solved).

2. *Ignoring works but is hard in practice.*

When young children cry out at night for attention, they want their parent(s) to come to their bed. I am sure you’ve heard that ignoring such attention-getting behavior is the way to go. Ignoring this behavior is theoretically sound but logistically difficult (if not impossible) in some households. If your child is capable of crying and whining in the middle of the night for 45 minutes or longer, your attempt to ignore such behavior will result in other people waking up and creating havoc. I believe my approach delineated below is more suitable. My colleagues and I have used it in clinical practice with referrals for such problems as crying and tantrums upon waking up at night (we are talking about children, of course). *Especially if you have tried ignoring these incidents of night waking and have been unsuccessful, this plan is for you.* If you believe you can be successful at ignoring the behavior at nighttime, then all power to you.

3. *Go to the child immediately, but do not get in his or her bed.*

Do not allow the child to cry incessantly before you go to his or her bed. In fact, teach the child that simply saying “Mommy, I am up” is sufficient to bring you. This should have the effect of quickly ameliorating lengthy and intense tantrums to get your attention and presence at nighttime. Go to them right away.

4. *Stand close to the child’s bed and assure him or her that you will be there.*

When you go to the child’s room, stand close to the bed and say “I’m here.” **However, do not get into the bed.** Your presence should help alleviate the child’s concern and fear of being awake at night with no one else awake, without needing to get into his or her bed. If you have previously made the mistake of sleeping in the child’s bed when he or she

wakes up, it may take a while for the child to be comfortable with this new arrangement. There may be some initial crying, but you need to avoid getting into the bed.

5. As your child closes his or her eyes, quietly move back a few steps.

When you see your child nodding to sleep, move back a few steps. Continue moving away from your child's bed as you see that she or he is falling asleep. Eventually, you will be out of the room. If the child awakens during this process, move back to his or her room and assure the child that you were there and will stay there until she or he falls asleep. However, do not get in their bed! Eventually, you will be able to go back to your bed once they fall into deep sleep.

6. With next awakening, stay a few steps further away from the bed.

If your child wakes up a second time during the night, follow the same process, except you should be one or two steps further away from the bed than you were the first time.

7. Each successive awakening results in you being further away.

Eventually, you should be able to hear your child call out for you, and you can respond from your bed, "I'm up until you fall asleep." The length of time it will take to get to this point varies by family. Realize that through this progressive fading of your presence, your child has become more and more comfortable with just hearing your voice and not seeing you.

8. Keep a journal for the first one to two weeks, delineating how the plan went each night.

You can write in your journal (see sample below) in the morning about how many times your child awoke and how much progress is being made.

**Parent Journal of Treatment Progress:
Nighttime Waking**

Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry:
Date:	Entry: