



Why Bedtime Can be Hard for Young Children – And What Helps

Bedtime can be one of the hardest times of day for families with young children. Your child may stall, cry, ask for another story, or keep coming out of their room. It can feel frustrating and exhausting. But bedtime struggles are often not really about sleep.

For many young children, bedtime means another separation from you after already spending much of the day apart. When we understand this, bedtime becomes easier to approach with empathy and connection.

Why Young Children Resist Bedtime. Think about your child's day:

- They wake up and reconnect with you
- Morning routine move quickly
- They separate from you for childcare, preschool, or school
- You reunite at the end of the day
- Evening routine begins
- Then bedtime means another long separation



For a young child, bedtime can feel like:

“I just got you back. I’m not ready to say goodbye again.”

What looks like bedtime resistance may actually be your child saying:

“I still need more time with you.”

Start with Connection When You Reunite

One simple strategy can make evenings much smoother. When you reunite with your child, try **spending 15 minutes of undivided attention together**. During this time:

- Put your phone away
- Avoid multitasking
- Sit on the floor or couch with your child
- Let your child choose the activity

Your child might want to:

- Play
- Show you something they made
- Snuggle
- Roughhouse
- Talk about their day
- Cry and release the stress of the day (*Kids sometimes need this before they can settle into the evening.*)

All of this is normal. What matters most is your full presence.

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Keep the Connection During Evening Routines

Instead of asking your child to play independently while you finish tasks, invite them into the routine. Young children love to feel helpful and included. Try simple ways to involve them:

During dinner prep	Setting the table	Small household tasks
Stand on a stool beside you	Carry napkins	Help rinse vegetables
Cut soft foods to cut with a child-safe knife	Place placemats	Put laundry in a basket
Stir or pour ingredients	Sort forks and spoons	Wipe the table

These small moments help children feel connected, capable and important. Remember: Your child has practiced independence all day. In the evening, they usually need more connection, not more independence.

Add Playfulness to the Routine

Young children move through transitions more easily when parents are playful. Try adding small moments of fun:

- Race up the stairs to the bath
- Use silly voices during tooth brushing
- Turn pajamas into a game
- Sing a bedtime song
- Create a rhyme
- Invent your own silliness

Playfulness helps reduce stress and encourages cooperation.

End the Day with a Calm Connection

Before lights out, spend a few quiet minutes together. This might include:

- Reading a bedtime story
- Snuggling
- Talking about the day
- Singing a song

These moments help young children feel safe, calm, and emotionally full before sleep.

If Bedtime Is Still Hard

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Sometimes young children still resist bedtime. Instead of pushing harder, try connecting first.

You might say:

- “I know it’s hard to say goodnight.”
- “I miss you when you’re sleeping too.”
- “What could help you feel cozy in your bed?”

Some children feel comforted by:

- Sleeping with a parent’s shirt
- A special stuffed animal
- A favorite blanket
- A nightlight

Helping your child solve the problem with you builds security and trust.

A Helpful Reframe for Parents

Bedtime struggles can feel like misbehavior.

But often your child is simply communicating a need.

Your child may really be saying:

“I’m not ready to be apart from you again.”

When we respond with connection, understanding, and shared routines, bedtime often becomes calmer for everyone.

