

Taking terror out of nightmares: Tips for parents

October 14 2012



Expert explains how to ease children's fears and possibly prevent bad dreams.

(HealthDay)—Nightmares are common in children and upsetting for both youngsters and parents, but there are some things you can do to manage and prevent them, an expert says.

You should never ignore a child's nightmare-related cries in the middle of the night and you should go to the child immediately, Dr. Tom Jackson, a California [psychiatrist](#) who specializes in treating sleep problems in children, said in a news release.

If you feel angry, frustrated or impatient with the child, take a few moments to calm yourself before going into the child's room. At this important moment, your child should not feel any [negative emotions](#) from you, Jackson said.

Comfort and calm your child by cuddling, gently stroking the child's

head or back, and reassuring him or her with comforting words. Listen to your child's fears with [empathy](#), understanding that those fears are real and should not be discounted.

Remind your child that it was only a dream, but remember that young children don't yet understand that dreams aren't real, Jackson said. Help your child take charge of dreams by suggesting, for example, that he or she imagine the nightmare ending in a happy way.

Preventing nightmares is the best solution and there are many ways to do this, Jackson said.

Make [bedtime](#) a comfortable and safe experience for your child. This can include relaxation-inducing rituals such as reading; having a bath or gentle massage; drinking a mug of warm herbal, caffeine-free tea; or something as simple as being tucked in with hugs and kisses.

If your child has frequent nightmares, talk together during the day to pinpoint what underlying fears may be causing the [bad dreams](#) and then try to resolve those fears, Jackson suggested.

It's also a good idea to analyze your child's daily routine to determine if there are things happening at school, home or elsewhere that could be causing nightmares. This includes monitoring your child's [television shows](#) and video games.

If nightmares continue even after you've taken steps to prevent them, it may be a good idea to discuss the issue with your child's doctor, Jackson said.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about [nightmares and night terrors in children](#).

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Citation: Taking terror out of nightmares: Tips for parents (2012, October 14) retrieved 21 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-terror-nightmares-parents.html>

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