

My Way to **Gentle Nights**

A clear **7-step** guide
to calm evenings and
better sleep



PART 2 OF THE CONNECTED FAMILY BUNDLE

by Michèle Hogeweg

Your Way to Gentle Nights

Welcome

Bedtime can turn into the most exhausting part of the day.

This eBook is for parents who are tired of evenings that keep escalating – delaying, arguing, getting out of bed, or emotions getting bigger the later it gets.

By the end of the day, children are often more tired, overstimulated, and less able to regulate themselves. That's why evenings can unravel so quickly, even after a good day.

When bedtime feels rushed, inconsistent, or overstimulating, many children struggle to slow down and settle. A clearer evening structure helps the brain and body recognize that rest is coming.

Through this eBook, you'll learn to:

- Create a clear evening structure your child can rely on
- Explain sleep and rest in ways your child understands
- Reduce stress and overstimulation before bedtime
- Let go of unrealistic expectations around "perfect sleep"
- Help your child's nervous system to wind down naturally
- Handle bedtime resistance without turning it into a battle
- Protect your own energy and create more restful evenings

Hi, I'm Michèle Hogeweg – founder of MyWay4Family

I work with parents who feel overwhelmed by family life and want it to feel more manageable. With MyWay4Family, I focus on what works – clear structure, real-life experience, and small changes that make a difference.

Step 1 – Understanding Sleep and Rest

Understand how sleep works and what children need

Step 2 – Building Evening Structure

Create a simple, predictable evening routine

Step 3 – Teaching Children About Sleep

Explain sleep in a way your child understands

Step 4 – Reducing Overstimulation

Lower evening intensity so your child can settle

Step 5 – Handling Bedtime Resistance

Respond calmly and hold boundaries when your child pushes

Step 6 – When Sleep Doesn't Come Easily

Handle night wakings, regressions, and difficult phases

Step 7 – Protecting Your Own Rest

Protect your evenings so you can stay steady

How to use this guide

Start by reading Step 1 and Step 2 to understand how sleep works and how to shape your evenings. Then begin with the assignment at the end of Step 2 and create your routine.

Once your routine is defined, read Step 3. Use this step to make the routine visual together with your child and explain each part in a simple, clear way.

After that, start implementing the routine consistently each evening.

When this foundation is in place, move to Step 4 – 7. These steps help you reduce overstimulation, handle resistance, navigate more difficult phases, and stay steady over time.

Step 1 – Understanding Sleep and Rest

Why sleep matters

Sleep is an active, essential process where children's bodies and brains grow, heal, and sort the day – kind of like their internal cleanup crew finally gets to do its job when the house is quiet.

Here's what's happening during sleep:

- Bodies release growth hormones
- Brains process emotions and experiences
- Immune systems strengthen
- Memories form and solidify
- Nervous systems reset and regulate

When children get enough quality sleep, you often see better emotional regulation, stronger immunity, improved focus, and healthier development overall.

When gentle nights don't happen

When nights are chronically hard (late sleep, constant fights, frequent waking, or stress-filled bedtime), many children start showing it in the day. This impacts your child and the atmosphere in your family.

Signs of a lack of sleep:

- Bigger meltdowns and lower frustration tolerance
- More impulsive behavior
- More anxiety around bedtime
- More conflict with siblings/parents

And the family feels it too:

- You have less patience and capacity (because you're running on fumes)
- Mornings get rougher, afternoons crash harder, evenings spiral faster
- The home climate becomes more tense and reactive – less connection, more “just survive till bedtime”

Poor sleep often makes emotions, transitions, and daily stress harder for the whole family.

Why evenings feel so hard

Children often resist bedtime because they're overtired, overstimulated, struggling with transitions, or unsure what to expect.

Common reasons bedtime is hard (and yes, kids can have more than one at the same time):

- Fear of missing out – They don't want the day to end, especially if it was fun
- Separation anxiety – Being alone in a dark room can feel scary
- Overstimulation – Too much activity, screen time, or excitement before bed
- Lack of routine – When bedtime is unpredictable, children resist because they don't know what to expect
- Developmental phases – Testing boundaries is normal; bedtime is an easy place to test
- Limited understanding – Young children don't understand why they need sleep

Understanding the “why” helps you respond with empathy instead of frustration – and it helps choose the right strategy instead of trying 47 random things in one week.

Different ages, different needs

A toddler's sleep needs are very different from a school-age child's. Expecting a 3-year-old to fall asleep like a 10-year-old will leave you both frustrated (and you'll end up questioning your life choices at 9pm).

General sleep guidelines

(total sleep needed per age in 24 hours):

- 1 - 2 years: 11 - 14 hours (including naps)
- 3 - 5 years: 10 - 13 hours
- 6 - 12 years: 9 - 12 hours
- Teens: 8 - 10 hours

These are guidelines, not rules. Some children need more, some need less. Pay attention to your child's individual needs and behaviour, not just the chart.

Sleep is not something you can force

This matters for your child and your family: You cannot make a child sleep. You can create the conditions for sleep, establish structure, teach them about rest – but you can't force their body to fall asleep.

This is good news. It means you can let go of the pressure to “make” sleep happen and focus on what you can control: the environment, the routine, the emotional tone, and the education around why sleep matters.

What you can control:

- The bedtime routine and timing
- The sleep environment (dark, cool, quiet)
- How much stimulation happens before bed
- Your calm, confident presence
- Teaching your child about sleep and rest

What you can't control:

- Exactly when they fall asleep
- Whether they wake in the night
- How long it takes them to settle

This shift reduces frustration and power struggles. You're succeeding when you create supportive conditions, even if they don't fall asleep instantly.

Step 2 – Building Evening Structure

Why predictability matters at night

A predictable routine helps children recognize that bedtime is approaching. Over time, the routine itself becomes a sleep cue.

When the evening follows a familiar rhythm, children know what to expect next. That predictability helps them slow down and settle more easily.

When bedtime feels rushed, inconsistent, or different every night, many children stay alert longer and resist winding down. Predictability reduces uncertainty and helps evenings feel calmer.

A steady bedtime rhythm:

- Signals to the brain that sleep is approaching
- Reduces anxiety (less uncertainty = less resistance)
- Makes transitions smoother (kids relax when they know the next step)
- Helps the body downshift gradually instead of suddenly
- Builds trust in the routine itself (“this always ends in cozy, safe sleep”)

A simple routine repeated consistently works better than an elaborate one that constantly changes.

Creating your evening routine

Your evening routine should be simple and realistic to maintain. If a routine only works on your best days, it’s probably too difficult to sustain.

Bedtime works best when the same calming steps happen in the same order. A helpful approach is to move gradually from more active moments into quieter activities before sleep.

The five core pieces of a bedtime routine

1. **A clear start cue.** A start time and a consistent phrase helps your child's brain switch gears – Example: "Okay love, bedtime routine starts now."
2. **Wind-down activities.** This is where you lower stimulation on purpose: calmer play, softer voices, dimmer lights
3. **Personal care.** Teeth, pajamas, toilet – the practical steps that can otherwise become 17 separate mini-battles if they're scattered
4. **Connection time.** A small, reliable moment of you. This matters more than most parents realize – kids separate more easily after a moment of connection (reading together is perfect for this)
5. **A consistent close.** A short goodnight ritual that stays the same – This becomes the final sleep cue: "This is the ending. Sleep is next."

Sample evening routine (Ages 3-8)

Use this as a flow, not a strict schedule.

- Dinner
- Bath or quick cleanup
- Pajamas + brush teeth
- Quiet play / drawing / books
- Story + connection
- Final toilet + tuck-in
- Lights out + goodnight phrase

The magic is the sequence. Not every evening will go smoothly. When the order stays familiar, the body learns what's coming – and settling gets easier.

The power of visual routines

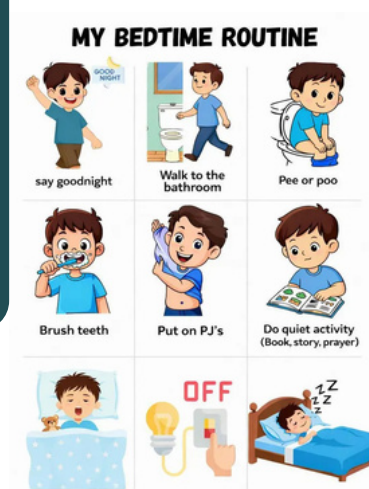
Young children don't experience time like adults do. "Bedtime in 30 minutes" can feel like a random threat from the sky. Visual routines make the evening visible, which reduces arguing and increases cooperation.

Listening, remembering instructions, and switching between activities becomes harder for children in the evening. A visual routine reduces the need for repeated reminders because children can follow what comes next more independently. The routine becomes the guide instead of another discussion about “one more” thing.

Visual supports are especially helpful for children who struggle with transitions or understanding instructions when they’re tired. A simple sand timer or visual clock can also help, because it turns time into something a child can see and understand

How to create a visual routine

- Take photos of each step (bath, pajamas, teeth, story, bed), or use simple drawings or symbols
- Print them or make a simple chart
- Let your child move a sticker/magnet as you go
- Put it where they can see it (bathroom, hallway, bedroom)



Handling transitions within the routine

Even with a solid routine, the hardest parts are usually the small transitions:

Play → bath

Bath → pajamas

Story → lights out

Every transition is a tiny ending, and endings are hard for tired children. The goal is to keep bedtime moving calmly and predictably so the routine continues to support settling down.

Transition tools that help with bedtime flow

1. **Give a warning** – “In 5 minutes we go upstairs.” – “One more page, then lights out.”
2. **Offer two bedtime options** – To give your child a choice inside the routine – “Where should your stuffed animals sit while we read?” – “Which book do we read tonight?”
3. **Use a simple cue** – A song for brushing teeth, a timer for bath, a phrase before bed – Repetition helps children settle more easily
4. **Keep your words short** – Short words feel safer and clearer when a child is tired
5. **Acknowledge the feeling, keep the sequence** – “I know you want to keep playing.” – “And it’s time for the next step.”

Bedtime stays predictable even when emotions show up.

When to be flexible (and when not)

Some nights need flexibility. That’s real life. A sick child, travel, a big emotional day – those are genuine needs, and your routine can bend. Be flexible when:

- Your child is unwell
- You’re traveling or out of routine
- There’s been a major life change (new sibling, moving, separation)
- Your child is truly dysregulated and needs extra comfort

But an important distinction is this:

“flexibility is not the same as changing the routine every night”

Try to protect the sleep cues when:

- Bedtime turns into a long, stimulating second wind
- Your child has learned that delaying changes the routine
- The sequence keeps expanding (“one more” becomes ten more)
- Your evenings feel more chaotic the later it gets

For deeper support with bedtime pushback and follow-through, My Way to Clear Boundaries expands on holding limits calmly and consistently.

A helpful question:

“Is this a real need... or is my child stuck in ‘I don’t want this to end’?”

If your child needs comfort, help them. If it’s end-of-day resistance, keep the routine moving calmly and predictably.

When the bedtime routine changes every night, settling down usually becomes harder because children no longer know what to expect.



Assignment – Observe and create a clearer bedtime structure

Take one or two evenings to observe what already happens during bedtime.

Write down:

- What time the bedtime routine usually starts
- Which steps already happen
- Where the routine tends to slow down or turn into negotiation

Now design the routine you would like to create. Write down 4-6 simple steps that would make evenings feel clearer and more predictable for your family.

As you do this, reflect for a moment:

If evenings became calmer and more predictable, what would that change for you and your child?

Step 3 – Teaching Children About Sleep

Why we sleep

Children cooperate more easily when they understand why something matters.

“Because I said so” might get you obedience once in a while, but it does not build internal motivation or understanding around sleep.

Bedtime often goes more smoothly when children start to see sleep as something that helps them, rather than simply the end of the day.

Use explanations that match your child’s age and attention span. Keep them simple and practical. (No one wants a TED Talk at 7:46pm. Not you, not them.)

Simple explanations for different ages:

- Ages 2 - 4: “Sleep helps your body grow big and strong. It’s when your brain rests so you can play and learn again tomorrow.”
- Ages 5 - 7: “When you sleep, your body fixes itself and your brain sorts everything you learned today. That’s why you feel better after a good sleep.”
- Ages 8+: “Sleep is when your brain processes emotions, stores memories, and your body grows. It also helps your immune system so you get sick less.”

Powerful tip: repeat the same one-liner most nights. Kids love repetition. After a while, they hear it and think: “Oh yeah. This again. Familiar.”

Talking about tired vs. sleepy

Young children often don’t recognize tiredness. They might be cranky, silly, hyper, or emotional – but they won’t say “I’m tired.” (They’ll say: “I’m not tired!” while bouncing off the couch.) So we teach them to notice body signals – like sleep detectives.

Help them name the signals:

- "You're rubbing your eyes. That's a tired clue."
- "You're yawning. That's a sign your body needs rest."
- "When everything feels annoying and your emotions feel more intense than usual, tiredness can play a role too."

Then make the distinction simple (because simple sticks):

Tired = my body needs rest, but it might not feel settled yet

Sleepy = my body is ready to fall asleep

You can even say: "Tired is the message. Sleepy is the moment." This awareness helps children understand themselves – and it reduces the confusion that often turns into resistance.

Making sleep feel safe

For many children, sleep feels vulnerable. They resist sleep when separation, darkness, transitions, or overstimulation make bedtime feel difficult. Your job is to build gentle safety cues around bedtime – so their body can relax enough for sleep.

Sleep-specific safety cues:

1. **Consistent bedtime routine** – A familiar sequence starts to feel predictable and reassuring. "I know what happens next."
2. **A comfortable sleep environment** – Dark, cool, quiet (or white noise), comfy bedding – make the bed feel like a cozy landing place
3. **Transitional objects** – Stuffed animal, blanket, or a small family photo can help with separation
4. **Night light if needed** – Some children need a dim light to feel safe
5. **Reassurance that stays short and steady** – A repeated phrase becomes a sleep cue too: "I'm right down the hall. You're safe. I'll see you in the morning."
6. **Connection before separation** – Children who feel rushed or unseen often fight bedtime harder, a short moment of connection before bed helps.

If your child has genuine fears (monsters, intruders, nightmares), validate and problem-solve – don't dismiss, and don't over-fuel it either. Calm confidence is the middle path.

Reframing rest as positive

Many children experience bedtime as having to stop something fun. When sleep starts to feel helpful instead of frustrating, bedtime often becomes easier.

Language that helps (simple + cozy):

- "Your body gets to rest and grow tonight."
- "Sleep is when your brain organizes all the fun you had today."
- "Everyone needs rest – even grown-ups."

And here are a few playful versions that stay kind:

- "Your body is charging tonight. Like a phone... but cuter and louder."
- "We don't end the day – we tuck it in."
- "Deep breaths and sleep."

Language that doesn't help because it creates stress around sleep:

- "If you don't go to bed, you'll be tired tomorrow." (threat energy)
- "Go to your room." (punishment vibe)
- "You're being bad by not sleeping." (shame)

Sleep is a biological need. Keep your tone neutral, warm, and factual – and let the routine do the heavy lifting.



Assignment – Make the routine visible and start using it

Create the visual version of the bedtime routine together with your child. Use photos, simple drawings, or small pictures for each step and place them in order on a chart. Walk through the routine together and choose one short bedtime sentence.

Step 4 – Reducing Overstimulation

How overstimulation affects sleep

When children are overstimulated – too much noise, speed, screens, excitement, or emotional intensity – their nervous system goes into overdrive. Although their body is tired, their brain can stay “on,” and settling becomes hard.

Sleep matters more than most people think: When children stay overstimulated into the evening, bedtime often takes longer, sleep quality can drop, and night waking can increase. That shows up the next day as bigger emotions, lower frustration tolerance, and more conflict.

Then the next evening starts more fragile... and the cycle repeats. My Way to a Calm Home expands on emotional regulation, predictability, and reducing overwhelm throughout the day.

You might notice overstimulation as:

- “Tired but wired” energy (silly / hyper at the wrong time)
- Meltdowns over tiny things
- Resistance to calming activities (bath / books feel impossible)
- A child who takes forever to fall asleep despite being exhausted

If you’re thinking, “Yep. That’s us,” I see you. This section focuses on small changes that often make evenings easier.

The Wind-Down Window

Ideally, the hour or two before bed is calmer so your child can shift from go mode to rest mode. But if your evenings are full (late dinner, homework, activities, life), you’re not disqualified from gentle nights. Even 30 minutes of intentional downshift helps.

Wind-down works best when the evening gradually becomes quieter and calmer. Softer lights, softer voices, calmer choices.

Wind-down helps most when you focus on:

- Light: Dimmer = sleepier
- Sound: Quieter voices / calm music if it helps
- Body: Warm bath / wash, slow movements
- Connection: A few minutes of you before separation

Common wind-down disruptors:

- Screens right before bed
- Stimulating or scary content
- Bright overhead lights
- Sugar close to bedtime

Pick one “tempo switch” phrase you say every evening after dinner: “Okay love, we’re in chill mode now.” Over time that sentence becomes a sleep cue.

Screens and sleep

Screens are a big bedtime disruptor for two reasons: the light can suppress melatonin (sleep hormone), and the content keeps the brain “on” (fast-paced, loud, activated). And also: many parents use screens because evenings are hard and you’re tired. Both can be true. The goal is to reduce stimulation before sleep as much as realistically possible.

If screens happen, aim for one of these “real life” upgrades:

- Best case: No screens 1 - 2 hours before bed
- Realistic case: At least 30 minutes screen-free

The most important piece is the buffer: Screen → buffer → routine → sleep

Buffers that work: bath, books, quiet play, drawing, cuddles, or a simple “sleep detective” moment (“What tired clues do you notice in your body?”). That small pause is often the difference between “wired and fighting” and “tired and settling.”

Creating a sleep-friendly environment

It helps when your child's sleep space feels calmer and less stimulating than the rest of the day. If the room screams "party/play/toys everywhere" their brain can stay in play mode. You don't need a full makeover, just a space that reflects how you want them to feel.

Sleep-friendly basics:

- Darker: Blackout curtains if early waking is an issue
- Cooler: Many kids sleep better in a cool room
- Quieter: Or white noise if household sounds wake them
- Cozy: Comfortable bedding + a familiar blanket/stuffy
- Less distraction: Fewer toys visible in the sleep space

If you do only one thing from this section: Soften the light at night. Bright overhead lights tell the brain "daytime," which is the opposite of what we want.

Your energy matters

Your child reads your evening energy like a weather report. If the house feels rushed, loud, or tense, their body often stays on high alert. The key is you: When you intentionally dial down that intensity, you create the space for sleep to show up. Children often respond to the emotional tone around them.

How to stay sane and calm them down:

- Start bedtime 10 minutes earlier than "crisis time" (it prevents the spiral)
- Keep your words short (bedtime is not speech-time)
- Shorten the routine if you're depleted
- Take three long exhales before you begin (basic, and effective)

When evenings stay overstimulating, bedtime gets tougher because children have a harder time settling down. Reducing overstimulation helps children regulate more easily and often makes evenings feel calmer for the whole family.

Step 5 – Handling Bedtime Resistance

Understanding why they resist

Bedtime resistance is normal. It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. Children resist sleep for real reasons, and when you understand the "why," you stop taking it personally – and you get much better at responding.

Most bedtime resistance comes from one (or a mix) of these:

- Control: Bedtime is one of the few things they can push back on
- Fear of missing out: They don't want the day to end
- Separation anxiety: Being away from you can feel big at night
- Not tired yet: Bedtime may be too early for their rhythm
- Overstimulation: Their brain is tired but still "on"
- Development: Testing limits is normal

Here's the firm truth (with love): when bedtime becomes a long, intense battle most nights, it usually leads to less sleep. And less sleep often shows up as more meltdowns, more impulsivity, more clinginess, more fighting, and a heavier family atmosphere the next day. Not because your child is "bad" – because their nervous system is under-rested. And under-rested kids often become sparkly little fireworks.

So yes – this matters for development, and it matters for family wellbeing. And you don't need perfection to change it. You need a plan you can repeat.

The "One More" trap

"Just one more story."

"Just one more hug."

"Just one more drink of water."

You know the one: one more story, one more hug, one more song... until suddenly it's 9:47 and you're staring into the void thinking, how did we get here?

“If you give in to “one more,” your child learns that boundaries are negotiable – then the requests will continue because you’ve shown them they work”

The “one more” trap is powerful because it delays separation, gives your child a sense of control, and keeps the connection going. It easily becomes part of the routine. What helps is deciding the boundary before you’re exhausted. Not in the heat of the moment.

A simple plan that works (without being cold):

- Decide the number ahead of time: “Two books tonight.”
- Name it early: “After two books, lights out.”
- Expect the protest: Children often push back when routines change.
- Close warmly and predictably: “I love you. See you in the morning.”

What to say when they ask for “one more”:

- “I know you want another one. We’re all done for tonight.”
- “Two books was the plan. Goodnight, love.”

Key detail: keep your words short. Bedtime is not a negotiation meeting.

A bedtime boundary that protects sleep

Once you’ve done the final goodnight, bedtime works best when your child learns: goodnight means goodnight. That doesn’t mean leaving them scared or alone with big feelings. It means being predictable: You connect, you close, and you don’t restart the night.

Gentle rule: after the final goodnight, stay out of the room unless there’s a real need (sick, bathroom accident, safety, genuine fear).

If they call you back, keep it calm, boring, and brief. No new story, no new conversation, no “extra round of cuddles” – because extra rounds keep the brain awake.

Your short script:

"You're safe. It's sleep time. Back to bed. I'll see you in the morning. Goodnight."

This is a sleep-cue boundary. The repetition helps bedtime feel familiar and predictable. Over time, the repetition helps children understand that bedtime is over and it's time to sleep.

Staying in bed

Some children get up repeatedly after lights out. They come out, call for you, or restart the routine like it's a bonus level. This is common.

What to do:

- Walk them back calmly, every time. No lecture. No anger. "It's bedtime. Back to bed."
- Don't restart the routine. No extra story, no extra talk, no "new plan."
- Meet real needs once, briefly. (Water? Bathroom?) Keep it practical and calm.
- Use a visual cue if helpful. A visual clock can say, "When it turns green, you can get up."

If your child is neurodiverse or highly sensitive, bedtime may require more patience, repetition, and predictability. Some children need more support or additional tools to slow down, transition out of their busy thoughts, and settle into rest at the end of the day. I use sleep meditations on a meditation app for both my son and myself to help us wind down before sleep.

If holding bedtime boundaries consistently feels difficult, *My Way to Clear Boundaries* goes deeper into limits, follow-through, and reducing power struggles without constant escalation.

When fears are real

If your child is genuinely afraid (dark, nightmares, being alone), dismissing the fear doesn't help. Neither does feeding it. My son suddenly turns into a professional actor on this subject. I still struggle to tell what's real and what's not – but in the end, my response stays the same.

The goal is to stay calm without dismissing the fear or feeding it further. You validate the fear, problem-solve together, reassure briefly, and return to the bedtime flow.

How to handle genuine fears:

- Validate – “I hear you. The dark can feel scary sometimes.”
- Problem-solve together – “What would help you feel safer? A night light? Your stuffed animal?”
- Reassure without feeding the fear – “You’re safe. I’m right down the hall.”
- Use a transitional object – a “protector” stuffy/blanket can be powerful
- Check for external causes – scary TV, school stress, big changes

Bedtime boundary + fear can both exist: You can be kind and steady to comfort them and still keep bedtime moving forward.

“Don't let comfort turn into an hour-long restart”

Collaborative problem-solving

If bedtime battles keep happening despite your efforts, involve your child in the solution – but do it during the day when you’re both calm. This increases cooperation because your child feels seen, and you still stay the guide.

A simple 5-step way to do it:

1. Pick a calm time – “I’ve noticed bedtime is hard for both of us. I want to make it better.”
2. Ask for their view – “What makes bedtime hard for you?”
3. Brainstorm together – “What could help you feel more ready?”
4. Agree on a simple plan – “Two books, you pick one.”
5. Follow through – Don’t agree to things you can’t sustain

Changing one thing consistently is often more effective than trying to change everything at once. Tip: Choose one change to try for one week. We’re doing gentle nights here, not a full home rebrand.

Step 6 – When Sleep Doesn't Come Easily

Letting go of 'perfect sleep'

It helps to adjust unrealistic expectations around sleep. Even kids with great routines still have off nights, regressions, growth spurts, and "I forgot how to be a sleeping person" phases.

Expectations that create unnecessary pressure:

- "They should fall asleep in 5 minutes"
- "They should never wake at night"
- "Bedtime shouldn't be a struggle"
- "Sleep should always be easy"

Embrace this instead:

- Regressions happen during developmental leaps
- Sickness, travel, and stress affect sleep

The goal is a structure with calm, predictable cues and a routine you can actually sustain.

If sleep struggles continue for a long time, the impact usually goes beyond tiredness. Poor sleep can affect learning, emotional regulation, patience, and the overall atmosphere at home. Evenings often become more reactive, with more conflict, shorter tempers, and less space for connection and play.

"Sleep affects the whole family"



Sleep regressions and developmental leaps

Just when you think, "Okay, we're getting it!" your child changes the rules. Welcome to sleep regressions... They often show up during major developmental leaps – new skills, brain growth, emotional development. These phases are common during development.

Common regression windows include:

- Babies: 4 months, 8-10 months, 12 months
- Toddlers: 18 months, 2 years
- Preschool: 3-4 years
- School age: growth spurts, developmental changes

What to do during a regression (simple + realistic):

- Keep the routine as steady as possible
- Offer extra comfort if needed
- Be careful about creating new habits you don't want to maintain
- Remind yourself: this is temporary
- Rest when you can (yes, I know... but even small pockets help)

Regressions often last 2 - 6 weeks. That can feel long when you're in it. But it does pass.

Reminder: during regressions, aim for "steady enough," not "perfect." Your job is to keep the sleep cues recognizable – even if the night is messy.

Night wakings

Many children wake during the night, even past infancy. Sometimes they can settle back to sleep. Sometimes they need help. The goal with night wakings is to keep it boring, brief and safe. Because the more stimulating the interaction, the more their brain says, "Oh! We're awake-awake!"

A gentle night-waking flow:

1. Pause before responding – Give them a moment to see if they resettle
2. Keep it calm and boring – Minimal light, talking & engagement
3. Meet genuine needs – If they're sick, scared, or need comfort – give it – keep it brief
4. Don't restart bedtime – No stories, no hour-long cuddling sessions, no "bonus bedtime routine" unless that's a conscious choice you want long-term
5. Reassure and close – A short script (use the same one every time) – "You're okay. It's still nighttime. Back to sleep."

Why this matters:

When night waking turns into long interaction, your child's brain learns "nighttime = connection party," and sleep gets lighter and more fragmented.

If night wakings stay very frequent or intense, it can help to look more broadly at possible underlying factors like overstimulation, stress, nutrition, anxiety, sensitivities, or discomfort.

Early morning wake-ups

Some children are natural early risers. If your child wakes at 5:00am ready to start the day like a tiny CEO, you may not be able to change it entirely – but you can set structure around it. The goal is a calmer and more predictable morning rhythm.

What helps early waking (pick 1-2 to start):

- Visual clock: "When the light turns green, you can get up. Until then, you can play quietly."
- Quiet morning basket: books, puzzles, a few quiet toys they can use independently
- Adjust bedtime if needed: sometimes early waking means bedtime is too early
- Blackout curtains: morning light can trigger waking
- Accept the rhythm: you can't force sleep – but you can shape behavior ("stay in room until X time")

If early waking is new or sudden, look for causes like illness, stress, a developmental leap, or too much daytime sleep. Tiny script as example:

“It’s still night. You can rest or play quietly until the clock shows that it’s morning.”

When to seek professional help

Most sleep challenges can be addressed with consistency, structure, and patience... but sometimes you need another set of eyes.

Consider a specialist if:

- Your child snores loudly or stops breathing during sleep
- They’re excessively tired during the day despite enough sleep time
- Sleep issues are severe and persistent even with a very consistent routine
- You suspect a medical issue (reflux, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome)
- Anxiety or trauma is significantly affecting sleep
- You’re completely burnt out and feel like you need help yourself

Some sleep challenges benefit from professional support. At the same time, some sleep approaches focus heavily on emotional reassurance while giving very little structure or predictability. Over time, this can leave parents exhausted and bedtime feeling increasingly unclear or inconsistent.

Look for qualified, evidence-informed support that combines emotional safety with clear structure, realistic expectations, and practical strategies.



Step 7 – Protecting Your Own Rest

You need sleep too

Your sleep matters just as much as your child's. When you're sleep-deprived, everything gets harder – your patience gets thin, your emotions get louder, and your ability to stay patient packs its bags and leaves. So this chapter is about protecting your energy too.

When a parent is chronically under-rested, the family atmosphere often shifts:

- Mornings become sharper and more chaotic
- Evenings escalate faster
- You react more and connect less (because your nervous system is maxed out)
- Consistency gets harder to maintain

Signs you're sleep-deprived (aka: your body sending an invoice):

- You feel constantly irritable or on edge
- You can't focus or remember things
- You're getting sick more often
- You feel emotionally fragile or weepy
- You're relying on caffeine to function
- You fantasize about sleep constantly

Protecting your evening

If your child's bedtime is 8:00 PM but you don't get time to yourself until 11:00 PM because you're doing chores, scrolling, or finally having a moment, you're not protecting your rest. You're just postponing tomorrow's exhaustion.

Evenings need an ending for parents too. Time to recharge, slow down, and step out of "doing mode" matters just as much for you as it does for your child. This is often the first quiet moment of the day where you can truly slow down too.

Here's the simplest way to protect your evening:

- 1) **Finish bedtime – and close it** - Once you've done the final goodnight, try not to keep going back unless there's a real need. The more the night keeps "reopening," the harder it becomes for everyone to settle down again.
- 2) **Limit evening chores** - Set a timer for 20-30 minutes. Do what matters most (quick reset, lunches if needed), then stop. The rest can wait. Your sleep is more valuable than a perfectly folded towel mountain. Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is recharge instead of finishing another task.
- 3) **Create a tiny wind-down routine for yourself** - You need a transition too. Dim lights, a warm drink, a calming show (or no screens if they keep you "on"). Let the evening gradually slow down instead of continuing at daytime speed.
- 4) **Set a bedtime for you (yes, really)** - Pick a time you can stick to most nights. Sleep works better for families when parents protect their own rest too.

Pick one and start tonight: either a chores timer or a parent bedtime. Not both. One small win builds momentum.



When you are parenting solo at night

If you're doing evenings solo – single parent, a partner working nights, or simply being the main bedtime person – consistency can actually become easier. There are fewer mixed messages, fewer last-minute changes, and more predictability around bedtime.

Solo nights can feel heavy when bedtime is chaotic or unpredictable – because you're the only one responding and everything seems to depend on you.

When clear sleep cues and routines become familiar, evenings often become calmer and more predictable. Over time, bedtime starts to feel like a clearer ending to the day instead of a long, exhausting process. As a solo parent, my evenings are sacred – it's my time to recharge. Unless my child is sick, of course. Parenting always keeps one wild card – like a toddler with zero impulse control.

Some phases will still be messy (sickness, nightmares, major life changes). But a steady routine creates more structure, clearer expectations, and more rest for everyone.

The long game

Sleep challenges won't last forever. The phase where they fight bedtime, the night wakings, the early mornings – this is a season, not your whole life.

In a few years:

- They'll put themselves to bed
- They'll sleep through the night more
- You'll have your evenings back
- You'll get uninterrupted sleep again
- It seems impossible to get them out of bed...(teenager vibes)

On the hardest nights, remind yourself: this is temporary. You're building a foundation now that will serve them (and you) for years to come.

Moving Forward

Your gentle nights, your way

Gentle nights usually come from small routines and cues repeated consistently over time. Children settle more easily when evenings start to feel familiar and predictable.

Choose one change and practice it for a full week before adding something new. The second week, keep the first change and build on it with one additional step. One change is enough to start.

You could choose:

- A clearer wind-down window (even 30 minutes)
- A visual bedtime routine
- A screen buffer (screen → buffer → routine → sleep)
- A shorter, calmer bedtime routine
- A closing phrase you repeat every night

Bedtime becomes more familiar through repetition. Children gradually learn what evenings look like, what comes next, and when the day is ending.

Some nights will still be harder than others, especially when your child asks for “one more” again and again. If bedtime boundaries remain the hardest part of the evening, *My Way to Clear Boundaries* goes deeper into limits, follow-through, and reducing repeated power struggles around bedtime.

Over time, these small routines and cues often make evenings calmer, clearer, and more predictable for the whole family.

“Predictable evenings are built one small habit at a time”

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Colophon

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