



Night Terrors



Little Village Sleep

WHAT ARE THEY?

“Night terrors (also known as sleep terrors) are defined as a cry or piercing scream, accompanied by the autonomic nervous system and behavioural manifestations of intense fear. Sometimes, there is prolonged inconsolability associated with a night terror. Notably, night terrors are distinguishable from less severe nightmares by difficulty waking the child. These events can be quite traumatic for those who witness them, although your child will typically have no recollection of the event. They often involve screaming, inconsolable crying, and a look of terror on the face of your child. Your child is often unable to calm and unawakenable, although sometimes they may look like they are awake with their eyes wide open but not seeing you. These episodes will happen during non-REM sleep, usually within the first part of the night and can last anywhere from 2 minutes to 30 minutes. They are more common for children over the age of three. But depending on the child, it can start in early toddlerhood.

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WHAT TO DO?

You are going to want to comfort your child and should comfort your child if that is what feels right, but you should also know that oftentimes, comfort will not be enough to stop the screaming and the thrashing. It is really important to ensure that you are keeping your child out of harm by moving anything that your child may bump into (children may sleepwalk when having a night terror). It is often recommended that you do NOT wake your child. Many parents who experience night terrors in their children will report that the more they try to wake their children, the longer the episode will last. Soothing comments and holding may be a good way to support them, provided it does not make them more upset.

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CAN THEY BE PREVENTED?

If your child has a night terror around the same time every night, some parents have found that using the 'wake to sleep' technique just before the event happens can reset the sleep cycle and prevent the night terror. This strategy can be found in my False Starts Guide.

The best thing we can do is ensure your child gets enough sleep by moving bedtime earlier, managing nighttime stress levels, and adjusting naps as needed. Studies have been done.

[Does co-sleeping help night terrors?](#)



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CONFUSIONAL AROUSALS

These often occur as early as six months and last until about five years of age. An extreme form of confusional arousal would be a night terror, but you can often see these to a lesser degree when a baby wakes crying, facing the back of the crib, and seems unresponsive to the parent. They may seem unaware of their surroundings and even seem agitated before returning to sleep fairly quickly. It can seem to present in the same way as sleep inertia and can happen because the baby is overtired.

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