

## TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

### NIGHTTIME ANXIETY

Grandfamilies deal with a gamut of issues. These tip sheets are about some of those issues where a few helpful hints might make a big difference. This month's tip sheet is focused on the worries your kids have at nighttime – nighttime anxieties - and what you can do to help them. First, it is important to understand what this anxiety is and what you can do to help change these behaviors.

Nighttime anxiety for kids is normal and hopefully a short stage for your kids. But sometimes a child becomes extremely anxious about separating from you at night, so much so that they have a hard time leaving your side because of the fear they have about what can happen when you aren't near them. This kind of anxiety is no longer normal and has probably caused a few problems in your life and in the child's. It is important for both you and the child to have some alone time and separate from each other. You need time at night when you can sleep comfortably in your bed without having a scared child knocking at your door or sleeping in your bed.

When you try to change nighttime fear and to get your kid sleeping in their own bed it is important to remember that things happen in small steps. Hopefully these tips will work for you, but they might not. If they don't, keep looking for new solutions by consulting a doctor or a counselor for advice.

- A beginning step you can try with your child to form a nightly routine in their bedroom on their bed. Do this so that your kids find comfort in their own bed and not in yours. If your child should happen to wake up in the middle of the night, you can follow this same routine over again and hopefully they will fall asleep quickly in their own bed. Try to keep the routine activities soothing like reading a story, discussing the happenings of the day or singing a song together. If you follow the same routine night after night the kids will know what to depend on and will probably be less anxious.
- Some parents give their child a walkie-talkie at night so that they have the comfort of knowing they can always reach you.

If these simple solutions aren't getting you results, suggestions taken from *Helping your Child Overcome Separation Anxiety and School Refusal* by Andrew Eisen and Linda Engler (which can be found in Maine Kids-Kin lending library) gives other ideas:

- For instance, they suggest that you ask your child to spend a few minutes alone in their room in the evening time. If your child can do that, make the time they spend alone each evening a little longer over time. You can make agreements with them about how far away from the room you will be, or whether you will be within earshot. You can also give them jobs to do in their room to distract them from their fear. This beginning step should be done until spending time in their room at night becomes easy.
- The next step is getting your kids to spend the night in their beds. Eisen and Engler suggest that you ask your child to sleep in their bed while you spend the night somewhere in their room, like in a chair or on the floor. You want the child to get used to you not physically touching them. Once this step is mastered, begin bargaining with them. Agree to wait until they fall asleep and then you will leave the room. If the child is still afraid to fall asleep, agree that you will wait till they fall asleep and then you will sleep in the hallway outside of their room. Keep making small steps like that until you are sleeping in your own room.

Try to be patient and keep the steps small. Remember this is only one set of tips and there are many others. If this is a serious issue for you it is important that you get help from a counselor. You could call the Maine Kids-Kin office. We can send you books from our library on the topic or we can help make referrals to professionals who are experienced in helping families with these issues.

---

*Copies of our tip sheets may be found on our web site at [www.mainekids-kin.org](http://www.mainekids-kin.org)  
Please contact us for permission to reproduce Maine Kids-Kin materials at [info@mainekids-kin.org](mailto:info@mainekids-kin.org)*