

LifeSkills: How to deal with bedwetting

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Have you thought of this? Emotional distress is usually not the cause of bedwetting, though it may be its consequence.

Bedwetting can be upsetting for the whole family. However, it's neither the child's fault nor the parents' fault. Most often, bedwetting is involuntary. Children generally want to stop wetting the bed since it's distressing for them, too. Usually, a child simply has not learned how to control the muscles that prevent bedwetting. Muscle control can be learned by appropriate motivational training. Such training requires the involvement of parents and child, but the parents need to initiate the process.

Taking action to deal with bedwetting will be a positive challenge. It shouldn't be a battle. Relax, and include activities you and your child enjoy in the training process. The trick is to take it easy — on yourself and on your child.

1. Keep track of successes.

- Put a calendar with large squares on a wall near your child's bed.
- Buy some gold stars (or, some other stickers your child picks out.)
- Propose to your child that for each night he or she does not wet the bed, you'll put a star on the calendar.

2. When your child earns a star, praise his or her behavior.

- Do not overemphasize that he or she has to stay dry again tomorrow.
- Give verbal rewards. For example, say That's great! or Wow! when your child stays dry all night.

3. Reward consistent success.

After three stars in a row, give your child a treat. Decide with your child what the treat will be—for example, going to see a movie together, playing an extra game of ball, or reading an extra-story.

4. Gradually increase the number of stars required to get a treat.

For example, after three weeks of good results with three stars per treat, increase the number of stars per treat to five.

At age five, 7% of males and 3% of females have bedwetting problems; by age ten, the percent ages drop to 3% for males and 2% for females.

Bedwetting has unhappy consequences. It places limitations on a child's social activities--for example, it interferes with a child sleeping at places other than home. It can affect a child's self-esteem and the degree of social rejection he or she experiences from other children. It may also trigger anger, punishment, or rejection on the part of parents.

5. Before your child goes to bed, facilitate his or her success.

- Make sure he or she doesn't drink too much.
- Make sure your child goes to the toilet.

6. Pay attention to your attitude towards your child when he or she wets the bed.

- Simply encourage your child to try again to get a star tomorrow.
- Do not scold him or her for wetting the bed.
- Do not criticize your child as a person—don't accuse him or her of personal weakness.
- Do not punish your child for bedwetting.
- Do not talk too much about the accident.

Note: If you have already done any of these do nots, remember it's never too late to change! Give yourself and your child time. Be patient. It is not realistic to expect the problem to go away in one night. You will probably notice that, gradually, your child will recognize that he or she is gaining control and will start to feel better.

While this process is taking place, the reward that was initially external (stars, treats), is becoming internal (your child feels proud). You will eventually get to a point where you won't need the star system anymore. Many factors can affect bedwetting behaviors.

If you try this strategy and it doesn't seem to work, consider seeking professional help. In particular, if your child starts to wet the bed after a year or more of being dry, emotional distress could be a cause. In this case, you may wish to seek a counselor's advice.