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Helping Your Child Have More Helpful Thoughts

All of us worry from time to time, but children who have excessive worries at bedtime can have a very difficult time falling asleep. As hard as it may be to control worries during the day, when a child is alone at bedtime, worries can take on a life of their own. To help children learn to control worries at night, they first have to understand how to control worries during the day. They can then begin to use this skill at night. The following provides guidance on how you can help your child have more helpful thoughts.

1. **It is important to teach children to problem solve when experiencing worries** (but only during the day). Children should not spend time in their bed generating solutions to all of their worries. If they learn to worry at specific times of the day, and generate solutions to their problems, they can then remind themselves at bedtime that they have already worried and/or already thought of solutions. The Think Like a Detective and Worry Time exercises can assist you in helping your child deal with her worries during the day, helping her sleep better at night.
2. **It is natural to want to comfort your child when she is upset because of her worries.** When a child has a lot of worries, many parents find that they want to reassure their child that she is okay, that the worries are not real, and that she does not need to worry about those things. The more you reassure your child, however, the more she will seek you out for those reassurances. When that happens at bedtime, it may look as if your child is stalling by getting out of bed repeatedly.
3. To help your child develop confidence in her ability to manage these worries, it **is helpful to provide reassurance only once** and then turn to the skills she is using to help manage her worries (Worry Time, Thinking Like a Detective, problem solving, etc.). For example, you can remind your child, "You know how to think like a detective. How likely is this worry to happen? How can you stop it from happening?"
4. **As you provide less reassurance** and guide your child to use the skills she is learning to manage worry, **you will see your child gain confidence** in her ability to manage her own worries.

Remember that most parents want to reassure their child that everything is going to be okay. Although this is a caring idea, it often serves to increase the child's dependence on the parent for providing comfort. Instead, by guiding your child to use the skills she is learning to manage worry, your child can begin to feel more self-confident. As this skill is built during the day, you will then see better sleep at night.