



PARENTING

The Parents Who Dread Their Kids' Bedtime



Being home for the evening routine is a point of pride for many moms and dads. But some relish missing it.

By Elizabeth Passarella, a magazine writer and author.

FEB. 29, 2024

SAVE

64

Photo-Illustration: The Cut; Photos: Getty

In the 14 years since I became a parent, I have done plenty of things I am not proud of while putting my children to bed. Some are insignificant: I've skipped over a few sentences, every other page, to make *Eloise* go faster. (Let this be my PSA for avoiding *Eloise* altogether; that book is interminable.) I've said, "I'll come back to check on you," and never came back. I did that last night, actually. Some things I've done have been more cruel: threatened to take a lovey, threatened to throw said lovey in the trash, turned the comforting bathroom light off. But the worst thing I've ever done was when my eldest child, a terrible sleeper, was around 6 or 7 years old and, after a protracted bedtime struggle wherein I had sat on the hard floor at the foot of her bed for hours and negotiated and cajoled and cried and pleaded, I stood up, stormed out of her room, and said loudly, "You are ruining my life."

In my defense — is it defensible? — it truly felt like she was. There was a precious sliver of time in the evenings, after my children were asleep, that was mine to feel human and unburdened, *unnneeded*, and she was stealing it. Moreover, the emotional hangover of bedtime meant the remaining hours of the night were tainted or, worse, tinged with dread that she was going to wake up at some point anyway, so why even relax?



Parents know that the baby-bedtime years will be hard. Infants need help learning how to fall and stay asleep at the right hours of the day, and there are a hundred different methods for doing so. The land of sleep deprivation is foreign and harsh, but it's expected. In the years that follow, however — when those babies are 6 or 7 or 8 — we kind of assume they should know the drill. We have sleep-trained and successfully transitioned to big-kid beds and everyone can get their pajamas on without help, and so we thought bedtime would get easier. We thought it would be like the movies, in which a parent tugs the comforter up to the drowsy child's chin, kisses her forehead, then walks out, giving one more wistful look through the cracked door before heading downstairs, not to hear from that child until breakfast. Maybe that is what bedtime looks like in your house. Maybe your children do not dance naked on their beds while swinging their pajamas around their heads like a lasso. Maybe when your child asks you to read one more book as a delay tactic, you are delighted. When my 5-year-old does that, I wish I could disappear, but that's just me. I believe there are more parents than we realize who are resentful — and then ashamed of being resentful — because their children will not go gently into that good night.

“I work later a couple of nights a week, and those are the best days,” says my friend Amy, a mother of three children, ages 10, 8, and 5, who share a room in their apartment in Manhattan. “I get home before they fall asleep, so I can still kiss them good night, but they're in bed. The chaos is over.” Leading up to bedtime, Amy's husband usually reads to the kids and then they listen to a kid-friendly sleep podcast. “Sounds lovely, right?” she says. “But my 5-year-old is so resistant to putting on his pajamas that he has an actual scratch on his forehead from us wrestling him into them.” He doesn't like the podcast his siblings enjoy, so he often ends up in Amy and her husband's bed.



Another friend, Maria, whose kids are 10, 7, and 4, says, “Our struggle is that ‘Go brush your teeth’ seems to be news to them every single night. As if they’ve never heard it. They fight me on taking a shower. It’s exhausting.”

The exhaustion, I’ve found, from talking to fellow parents, is twofold: We are worn out from our children’s shenanigans, yes, but it’s also a weariness from feeling as though we should *enjoy* bedtime when we do not. “Each of my kids wants to be hugged and kissed and told they are the most special person in the world. I feel selfish for resenting the energy it takes to do that. I know they won’t want me to linger forever. But this is also my solo adult time,” says Maria. There are nights in my house when bedtime for my youngest is smooth. He climbs into bed and we read a couple of books and I lie with him until he falls asleep, which sometimes takes only ten or 15 minutes. Still, I can be short-tempered and snappy. I will deny him a third book because I just want him to be asleep. My friend Rachel once told me, “I feel the worst when I take away books as a punishment, like, ‘You didn’t listen when I said it was time for bed, and now it’s late and we can’t read.’ That doesn’t seem right.” But who among us can’t relate? I am a person of faith whose own mother prayed lovingly at my bedside every night, and I can’t remember the last time I did the same — not always because we don’t have time (honestly, how long does it take to say a quick prayer?) but because my heart isn’t in it. I’m testy, unable to muster anything resembling reverence or peace.

“Of course you are tired and have more irritability. Our fuses are shorter at night. And kids pick up on us being frustrated and stall even more,” says Shelby Harris, Psy.D., an associate professor of psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the author of *The Women’s Guide to Overcoming Insomnia*. (She also shares sleep tips on Instagram as @sleepdocshelby.) Short fuses could exacerbate bedtime struggles with any age, but Harris says the post-baby but pre-teen stage is the least discussed, which does leave parents in the dark. When I ask why

some kids, even if they were good sleepers as toddlers, seem to resist bedtime or become more challenging in the early elementary years, Harris tells me that the problem may be in our expectations. “Parents are often stuck on an early bedtime. They get used to their second-grader going to bed at 7:30 or eight every night. But kids’ natural body rhythms change. They shift. Maybe your child needs to go to bed at 8:30. You have to be okay with that,” she says.

As for the expectation that bedtime should be tell-me-about-your-day-sugar-bun time, Harris says we should probably let go of that, too. “We need to help our kids wind down, but we don’t have to spend that time *together*,” she says. Take away the screens, yes, but let your kids stay up a little later reading or coloring on their own in their room. Don’t fight them if the light isn’t out at 8:32 p.m. And don’t feel bad if you don’t have a heart-to-heart while sharing a duvet. “You can find other pockets of the day for that,” says Harris.

A friend with children older than mine once told me, when I was still in the throes of weeping on the floor next to my firstborn’s bed, that one day, that child would read a book in bed and fall asleep on her own. “Ha! Impossible,” I said to my friend. But she was right.

At 14, my daughter is a healthy sleeper now and no worse for wear after our years of rage-filled bedtimes. I’m the one who still has flashbacks, who is overly reactive any time one of my younger kids seems itchy and anxious at bedtime, because I think it spells doom for the next three hours. Would we all have been better off if I’d let her stay up later? If I hadn’t tried to create dreamy tableaux of mother and daughter curled up reading mother’s favorite childhood

book, chapter by chapter? If I hadn't felt so guilty that we failed? Most likely. My third child is the easiest to put to bed, and there are many factors at play, but my disinterest in any sort of power struggle or, frankly, talking to him in general has to be part of it. You will never catch me saying, "Bedtime is just the sweetest time." It is often the worst. If you hate it, you're in good company.

TAGS: PARENTING SELF SLEEP KIDS MORE

■ SHOW 64 COMMENTS



MOST POPULAR

1. [27 Ways to Have Much Better Sex](#)
2. [Anna Faris's Son Is All Grown Up](#)
3. [The Women Who Taught Me to Be a Tradwife](#) 🎧
4. [The Loneliness Influencers](#)
5. [Inside the 'Unboring, Ungendered' World of Milk Teeth](#)

THE LATEST



2:32 P.M.

Sunscreen, Sandals, Swimsuits, and More Summer Sales to Shop This Weekend

2:13 P.M.

Karen Read Is Suing the Massachusetts State Police

 Jurors sent home after beginning deliberations in Karen Read retrial



1:56 P.M.

All the Celebrities at the Hermès Show



11:41 A.M.

What Alicia Keys, Lynn Yaeger, and Julia Fox Wore This Week



11:39 A.M.

Kane Parsons Is Still Wondering How This Happened



11:33 A.M.

Olivia Lopez's Go-To Solo-Date Spots in Los Angeles

 JAMES
HANDY

11:24 A.M.

What We Know About the Death of James Handy



11:08 A.M.

22 Pairs of Sandals That Make Me Want to Show Off My Toes



11:07 A.M.

Rebecca Glashow Says It's Okay to Use Your Phone at Night



10:00 A.M.

A New Prime Day Date Just Dropped



MUSIC | 7:00 A.M.

It's a Naomi Scott Summer Her debut album, 'F.I.G,' is juicy and sensual with its own subtle tartness. Take a bite.

By Cat Zhang



5:00 A.M.

Your Daily Horoscope by Madame Clairevoyant: June 5, 2026



YESTERDAY AT 3:03 P.M.

Anna Faris's Son Is All Grown Up



YESTERDAY AT 1:55 P.M.

Vasana Montgomery Has Already Left the *Love Island USA* Villa



YESTERDAY AT 1:23 P.M.

Gayle King Is Shooting Her Shot With Tom Brady

YESTERDAY AT 12:05 P.M.

Did Brandy Melville Really Close Its Fitting Rooms?

 Brandy & Melville Shop In Madrid

YESTERDAY AT 11:49 A.M.

Sharon Stone Says Her Ex Didn't Want Her to Get a Mastectomy

 The Fashion Awards 2025 Presented By Pandora - Arrivals

YESTERDAY AT 11:43 A.M.

Persepolis Author Marjane Satrapi Has Died

 6th



YESTERDAY AT 11:09 A.M.

All the Best FIFA World Cup Merch



YESTERDAY AT 9:00 A.M.

Zoe Saldaña Knows When It's Time to Go Home

MORE STORIES >

THE CUT

STYLE | SELF | CULTURE | POWER

ABOUT THE CUT

NEWSLETTERS

CONTACT

MEDIA KIT

PRIVACY

AD CHOICES

ACCESSIBILITY

ABOUT NEW YORK MAGAZINE

HELP

PRESS

WE'RE HIRING

TERMS

DO NOT SELL MY INFO

DO NOT SELL OR SHARE MY PERSONAL DATA