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The Good-Morning Light

Meltzer / McLaughlin "Pediatric Sleep Problems - A Clinician's Guide"

The Good Morning Light is a simple way to teach your child the difference between night and day. As adults, we simply look at our clocks to tell us whether we should go back to sleep or get up. But young children do not have this ability. The following provides guidance on how to create and effectively use the Good Morning Light.

1. Plug a night-light into a timer, the kind you would use to turn your lights on and off if you were on vacation, or to turn your holiday lights on and off. Timers can be purchased at any hardware, home improvement, or large retail store.

If your child already uses a night-light

2. Set the timer so the light comes on about 30 minutes before your child's bedtime and goes off around the time your child is currently waking up in the morning to start the day. For you, the light should go on at _____ and off at _____.
3. During your bedtime routine and at bedtime, point at the light and say, "The light is on, it is sleeping time!"
4. If your child wakes during the night or before his current wake time, go in and point at the light and remind him, "The light is on, it is sleeping time!"
5. Once the light goes off in the morning, be ready to get up with your child. Point at the light and make a very big deal that the light is off and it is time to get up.

If your child does not use a night-light

2. Set the timer so the light comes on around the time your child is currently waking up in the morning to start the day. For you, the light should go on at _____.
3. During your bedtime routine and at bedtime point at the light and say, "The light is off, it is sleeping time!"
4. If your child wakes during the night or before his current wake time, go in and point at the light and remind him, "The light is off, it is sleeping time!"
5. Once the light goes on in the morning, be ready to get up with your child. Point at the light and make a very big deal that the light is on and it is time to get up.

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After 1 to 2 weeks of pairing the light with your child's current waking time

6. Once your child understands that the light signals that it is morning time, you can move the timer so his wake time is 15 minutes later. You can continue to move the timer 15 minutes later every 5 to 7 days until the desired wake time is reached.
7. Once in place the Good Morning Light can also be used for naptime.

Important Things to Remember

- You must respond consistently to all night wakings for your child to understand that when the light changes, it is time to get up. For example, if you bring your child to your bed before the light changes, he will not look at the light to see if it is time to get up but will continue waking up hoping that eventually you'll take him to your bed.
- Make sure your child can see the light, otherwise he will not make the association between the light changing and waking up.
- At the same time, make sure your child cannot play with or change the timer.
- Once your child makes the association, do not change the time too quickly!! This can result in child frustration and prolonged crying.

The Good Morning Light provides a quick and easy visual cue for your child to learn the difference between night and day. However, for it to really work, you need to have the light change at a time close to your child's current wake time. You also need to provide a consistent response to nighttime awakenings and not "rescue" your child before the light changing.