



## Children's Nightmares - how to address them

Nightmares and/or recurring bad dreams can be a traumatic experience for a child and will affect their sleep pattern and routine. Your child may be reluctant to go to bed, say they're not tired, wake themselves up in the early hours and need reassurance during the night. So here is a tried and tested technique to address children's nightmares or bad dreams that ALWAYS works!

If your child experiences a nightmare or recurring bad dreams, set aside a block of time the next day to sit with them. Ensure that you have uninterrupted time, even 30 minutes to give this your full attention. You will need; paper (2 sheets), markers or crayons/pencils.

- Sit down with your child and tell them that you know a way of stopping bad dreams that ALWAYS works.
- Invite them to think about the bad dream and to draw the bit of the dream that scares them most. Reflect on what you see in this drawing without projecting your own thoughts, in other words "I see this Black bit here, I wonder what that is"
- **NOTE: The use of "wondering" can facilitate your child to go deeper into the dream but doesn't put pressure on them if they don't want to, in the way direct questions can put pressure on them to produce an answer.**
- Tell them that dreams are exactly like movies and that they are the director of their dream so can decide to yell "cut" and change the scene.
- Now, have them look at the scary drawing, yell "cut" and now invite them to think about how they would like the dream to go, what would they like to happen instead of this scary bit that would make it a happier dream. Have them visualise the happier change, what does it look like, how does it feel etc.
- When your child has the new 'scene' in mind, have them draw this new scene for the dream. Again, reflect on what you see, use "wondering" to encourage them to talk about this happier scene.
- Once done, tell your child that they can tear up the scary part and throw it away and go with them as they bring the new happy dream scene into their bedroom and they can either pin it to the wall by their bed so that they see it every night or place it under their pillow, whichever they prefer.
- Again, reiterate that this ALWAYS works so the bad dream won't come back again.

By sounding supremely confident you validate this technique as working and empower your child to control the dream. The dream itself is important, it is your child's way of unconsciously processing thoughts during the night so it is equally important that you spend some time during this process reflecting and wondering with them about the bad or scary parts of the dream, this enables them to put words and feelings onto what is happening and to bring it from their unconscious to their conscious thinking, they can thereby process it and let it go. The happier drawing empowers them to change the dream and take control of it and change the ending, ultimately reaffirming that when something is scary, they can 'discuss' it with you, think about it, talk about changing the scary thing and then let it go of it. It also allows you and your child to enjoy a restful sleep again.

This technique doesn't mean your child will never have another bad dream but it can be used again and again where necessary. It is particularly effective where a child is experiencing a recurring dream. If there is a pattern of recurring and/or frequent bad dreams it may indicate an underlying anxiety, in which case you might want to consider seeking professional advice/support from a child psychotherapist/ play therapist /psychologist.



**Top Therapist Tip**  
The key to this technique is that you must be supremely confident in it working and be able to sell that in how you present it to your child for it to be effective.



 **Joanna Fortune**

For further information about this or other child development/behavioural challenges contact Solamh - Parent Child Relationship Clinic on 01-6976568 [www.solamh.com](http://www.solamh.com)

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