



The **TOOLBOX**

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



ABRACADABRA TO OVERCOME AND PREVENT NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: From 18 months until adolescence

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Parents

DESIGN

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ABRACADABRA TO OVERCOME AND PREVENT NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Parents

– Details: All caregivers (e.g. parents) and children.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

- Tips for overcoming nightmares are suggested for children from the age of 3 to adolescence.
- Night terror tips are useful for children from 18 months to adolescence.

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

NEEDS:

- Children who have nightmares and/or night terrors may report a need for safety.

BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS:

- Frequent and/or intense nightmares;
- Frequent and/or intense night terrors.

SPECIFIC GOALS

GOAL 1: To reduce the frequency and intensity of nightmares in children and teens.

GOAL 2: To overcome and prevent the occurrence of night terrors in children and teens.

DESIGN

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DEFINITION OF NIGHTMARES

Nightmares are defined as disruptive mental experiences that often end in awakening. It's normal for children or teens to report nightmares. Nightmares are common in preschool and school-aged children (between 3 and 8 years of age), during which time children learn to differentiate between reality and imagination. In general, 20% to 40% of children aged 5 to 12 report having nightmares. Beginning in adolescence, girls tend to report more nightmares than boys. **As a parent, when is it appropriate to use some tips to overcome your children's nightmares?** When they are frequent and intense and, most importantly, when the children complain about them.

DEFINITIONS OF NIGHT TERRORS

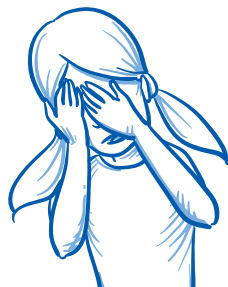
Night terrors are defined as incomplete awakenings accompanied by crying or loud screams and when the autonomic nervous system is highly activated (e.g. tachycardia, sweating, rapid breathing and gasping). Night terrors usually begin with a shrill cry about 90 minutes after falling asleep and the children may be sitting in bed with a scared look on their face. Less frequently, the children may leave their bed in panic. The children are inconsolable and rarely remember the event in the morning. Night terrors are common in preschoolers up to the age of 10. Approximately 1% to 6% of children experience recurrent episodes of night terrors. About 35% to 45% of children and teens have experienced night terror at least once in their lives. **As a parent, when is it appropriate to use some tips to reduce the occurrence of your children's night terrors?** When they are frequent and intense and, most importantly, when the parent feels anxious or the children have a lack of sleep associated with this condition.

STRESS, NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS

There is also a link between anxiety level and occurrence of nightmares/night terrors in children. Our coping skills are put to the test in particularly stressful contexts. When our daily lives are filled with unforeseen events and new things, a sense of loss of control may overwhelm us. Under these circumstances, it's quite normal for stress to take the form of sleep disturbance. Since children are not always able to understand and verbalize their emotions, the frequency and intensity of nightmares and night terrors may be a clear indicator to parents of their children's stress.

LEARN TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS

First, if you want to use the suggested tips, it's important to learn how to tell the difference between nightmares and night terrors. Generally speaking, children who have nightmares completely wake up, need to be reassured by their parents and remember their nightmares the next day. In addition, nightmares occur at the end of the night (second half of the night). Conversely, children do not seem fully awake during night terrors. They are more agitated, difficult to console and have no memory in the morning. Night terrors usually occur at the beginning of the night.





DECREASING THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF NIGHTMARES

To help your children get back to restful sleep, follow these three simple tips.

- **TIP 1: Change a nightmare into a happy ending**

The day after a nightmare, during the day (not close to bedtime), ask your children to tell you about it in more detail by identifying the terrifying aspects. Then ask them to draw an image/scene of their nightmare that contains the terrifying aspects. Finally, ask them to redo a drawing in which the terrifying aspects are changed into positive, happy or funny aspects. You could also do a verbal exercise with your children in which they tell you about their nightmare and then you change the scary ending to a happy or funny ending. Repeat the exercise each morning when your children have had a nightmare the night before.

- **TIP 2: The magical object**

In anticipation of terrifying nightmares, some objects can help reduce children's anxiety, such as a magic spray or wand that makes monsters disappear or a protective stuffed toy. These objects can be drawn and stapled to the wall or they can be real objects that the children make and keep close to them at night. The objects will give them confidence to manage their nightmares and regain control of their sleep!

- **TIP 3: Avoid stress in the evening**

If your children have frequent nightmares, avoid exposure to movies, stimulating shows or conflict before bedtime as much as possible.

OVERCOMING AND PREVENTING NIGHT TERRORS

Lack of sleep combined with stress may be responsible for the occurrence of night terrors. To reduce night terrors, follow three simple tips:

- **TIP 1: Maximize sleep time**

Maintaining a stable routine (same bedtime and waking time every day on weekdays and weekends) and a sleep-friendly environment (calm, dark, cool) reduces the lack of sleep, which is a trigger for night terrors in children.

- **TIP 2: Eliminate triggers**

A noise, light or an urge to urinate can trigger a night terror. Provide a soothing sleeping environment for your children and make sure they go to the toilet before bed. When going to bed, make sure you don't make any noise or turn on lights that could interfere with the children's sleep.

- **TIP 3: Avoid stress in the evening**

Avoid movies or shows with too much "tension" as well as conflict and stressful games during the evening.

- **TIP 4: Scheduled awakenings**

If night terrors occur at about the same time every night, the parent can briefly wake up their children before the onset of night terror. This tip is useful to reduce the likelihood of night terrors.

USEFUL RESOURCES



Support for parents (website and helpline)

<https://sleeponitcanada.ca/sleep-disorders/night-terrors/>

https://www.ligneparents.com/LigneParents/Tous-les-themes/Etapes-et-defis/Sommeil?gclid=CjwKCAjwrcH3BRApEiwAxjdPTYut9VwVYZbrPyJq6xtxd-xekl2lw70CZwP4TDNrBxMVtlnMOIYx9xoCmGUQAvD_BwE

Bedtime routine (printable posters and pictograms)

<https://agirtot.org/media/489664/routine-dodo-affiche.pdf>

<https://agirtot.org/media/489663/dodo-adecouper.pdf>

Relaxing activities before bedtime

<https://www.educatout.com/activites/yoga/activites/une-routine-de-yoga-pour-favoriser-le-sommeil.htm>

<https://www.yourcalmspot.com/home>

<https://papapositive.fr/mon-paysage-apaisant-un-exercice-pour-faciliter-le-sommeil/>

<https://coloriage.info/>

Petit rituel zen : 30 histoires relaxantes pour s'endormir en douceur (2017). Auteurs : Pascale Pavy, Oréli Gouel.
Éditeur : Mango.

