The Bedtime Pass Program

The bedtime pass program is for children ages 3-10 who often get out of bed or call out after bedtime. The goal is to encourage children to stay in bed quietly, so they are more likely to fall asleep quickly. A child is given passes that he or she can use to get out of bed or call out after bedtime. Once the passes are gone, the child must remain in bed. Any passes the child does not use at night can be traded for a reward the next morning. This program works best when used after a calming bedtime routine.

Instructions

**Plan the program.** Choose the number of passes your child will get each night (usually between one and three). If he or she usually gets up or calls out only once or twice, he or she should start with one pass. On the other hand, if he or she usually gets up or calls out five or more times, start with three passes.

*My child will start with ___ passes.*

Choose a reward that your child can earn if he or she does not use the passes. This could be a sticker, small toy, privilege (e.g., computer time) or points that can be added up to earn a larger reward. To get off to a good start, the rewards should be something your child really likes and will want to earn. After your child is doing well, you can gradually make the prizes smaller. Usually younger children (3-5) respond better to a reward they can earn every morning, whereas older children are more likely to be motivated by earning points towards a larger reward. Your child can help you choose a reward.

*My child can earn ____________ for each pass he or she saves.*

Decide what activities will and will not be allowed using the bedtime pass. For example, a child might be allowed to use the pass to ask a parent a question, get something to drink, use the bathroom, get a stuffed animal to sleep with or simply get another hug. A child might not be allowed to use the pass to get a snack or get out of bed to do a longer activity.

*My child is allowed to use the pass for these activities:*

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

**Explain the program to your child.** For older children, it may work just to explain how the program will work. For younger children (3-5 years), practicing the program during the day can help them understand how it works. You and your child can pretend to use the program using two stuffed animals, or let your child be the parent while you pretend to be the child.
Start using the program. At bedtime, give your child his or her passes, or place them somewhere in the room where he or she can see them. If your child gets out of bed or calls out asking something that is allowed, let him or her have the request as long as he or she gives you one of the passes. Your response is positive or neutral (i.e., not annoyed or angry), because he or she is following along with the program. Once the passes are gone, your response is to say no to all requests (except perhaps using the bathroom). Do not yell or give negative attention, but simply tell your child that he or she is out of passes so you have to say no to his or her request. The next morning, give a reward and lots of praise for any passes that were not used the night before.

Gradually stop the program over time. Once your child has been successful for at least two weeks (i.e., having passes left over most mornings), take away one pass. That is, if he or she started out with three passes per night, explain that he or she will now start each night with two passes. After another successful two weeks, reduce the number to one pass. Once your child is successful with just one pass per night, you have the choice of either continuing the program or stopping the program. You can stop the program gradually by giving a reward for the pass only every other day, then every third day, then not at all. You can also explain that your child can now earn the reward for a different behavior you want to see, such as doing chores or good behavior at school. Many children will continue to stay quietly in bed, as they have developed this habit. If your child starts calling out or getting up again, start the bedtime pass program again.

Troubleshooting

- If your child is not earning rewards because he or she always uses the passes, try making the rewards more exciting or giving him or her another pass.
- If your child is not staying in bed once the passes are gone, talk to a provider about other strategies to manage this behavior.
- If your child struggles with bedtime fears or worries and is very upset at bedtime, talk to a provider about ways to help with the fears or worries.
- If your child stays in bed without calling out but is still awake in bed for more than 30 minutes, talk to a provider about other ways to address this problem.

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