

**Sample Q and A for
Become Your Child's Sleep Coach:
The Bedtime Doctor's 5-Step Guide, Ages 3-10**

We are talking today with Dr. Lynelle Schneeberg, PsyD, about her new book, *Become Your Child's Sleep Coach: The Bedtime Doctor's 5-Step Guide, Ages 3-10*.

Dr. Schneeberg is a pediatric sleep psychologist, an assistant professor at the Yale School of Medicine and the director of the behavioral sleep program at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. As a fellow of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, she is board-certified in sleep medicine. She also has a private practice and a website (drschneeberg.com) where she shares information on kids and sleep.

How is this book different from other sleep training books out there and why did you write it for parents of 3-10 year olds?

Most sleep training books are written for parents of babies and toddlers. I wrote mine for parents of preschool and elementary school children because so many of these kids have sleep problems, too, and because sleep training an older child can often be much more complicated.

What exactly do you mean by "sleep training"?

When I use the phrase "sleep training" in this context, I mean helping a child learn how to fall asleep easily and quickly after the bedtime routine is over without much help from a parent. If parents struggle with this, they have plenty of company. In the National Sleep Foundation's **Sleep in America** poll, almost three out of four parents reported that their child's sleep needed improvement.

How did you come up with your 5-step guide?

My 5-step guide was developed from years of experience working with families and from my training to become board-certified in sleep medicine, so it is both evidence-based and experience-based. I love helping parents teach their kids to become great sleepers and I wrote this book to share my secrets with a wider audience.

How do poor sleeping habits affect a child physically, emotionally and academically?

Let me answer that by reviewing the opposite side of the coin: how great sleep habits benefit children in innumerable ways. High quality sleep leads to better daytime behavior, greater academic performance, improved mood, more frustration tolerance, less anxiety, better health and development, enhanced immune function...I'll stop now (but I could go on and on).

How do protracted bedtime routines, kids waking in the middle of the night, etc. affect the whole family?

Protracted bedtime routines lead to stressed out, exhausted families and well-designed ones lead to much more peaceful homes in the evening. My 5-step guide will help parents design a successful bedtime routine of a reasonable length and will help them teach their children to fall asleep independently and quickly and stay in their own beds all night long. This is not an

impossible dream! This is very achievable once parents know exactly what to do, and this goal, once achieved, provides so many benefits to every member of the family.

We've already talked about the benefits to children so let's focus for a moment on the benefits for the parents. Parents can spend quality time with each child at bedtime, can get some of their own things done after the bedtime routine is over, and can spend time together as a couple. Achieving this goal also gives every member of the family much less interrupted sleep at night.

Finally, sleep coaching school-aged children to become independent sleepers sends a message that the master bedroom is for you and your partner. (It also prevents a fairly familiar scenario in which one parent leaves the spacious king bed in the master bedroom to sleep in the race car or princess bed in the child's room after a very restless little sleeper arrives in the middle of the night!)

What are some ways in which parents inadvertently contribute to prolonged nighttime routines? Can you explain what a "sleep prop" or "sleep crutch" is?

Parents often make two mistakes at bedtime. These are made with the best of intentions, but they result in prolonged routines and in children who are often poor sleepers.

The first mistake is **staying with a child until he or she is completely asleep**. All parents know the joy of snuggling at bedtime but if a parent stays too long, he or she becomes what is known as a "sleep crutch" or "sleep prop." This just means that the child can fall asleep only if the parent is nearby. When the child wakes up during the night (as all children do, usually at the end of a sleep cycle), the child must find the parent again in order to get back to sleep. This usually leads to lots of interrupted sleep at night.

The second mistake parents make is **granting too many extra requests after lights out**. Parents do this with the hope that children will finally fall asleep once they have everything they need. In actuality, granting all of these requests encourages children to stay awake! After all, their favorite people keep showing up with wonderful things (more kisses and hugs, special blanket tucks, longer back rubs and so on).

There are easy fixes for both of these in my book.

I imagine you don't want to give away what the 5B Bedtime Program is, but can you provide a little context?

I'd be happy to tell you what the 5 steps are since this will give you a sense of what is included in the book.

- Prepare your child's bedroom for great sleep
- Use the 5B Bedtime Routine to calm and settle your child at bedtime
- Teach your child to self-comfort as you work your way out of the room
- Limit callbacks and curtain calls (extra requests after lights out)
- Manage night and early morning wakings

Why did you decide to include stories in your book?

I wanted to include stories of real kids with a wide variety of sleep issues whose parents had used the 5-step guide to help their kids to become great sleepers. I collected two dozen of these stories, changed all identifying details, and put them into the book. I hope that these stories allow parents to see the five steps in action and learn exactly how to sleep coach their own children.

Is there a one-size fits all solution? What should parents do if the steps are not working?

The 5 steps work well for almost all school-aged kids. But if the steps are not working, it can be helpful to consult a sleep professional to determine whether there may be other factors at play. I find that most families only need to be seen two to three times to sort things out. For example, there are simple ways to reduce or eliminate any anxiety that could arise during this process, and there are some medical sleep disorders that cause wakings at night that may need to be ruled out with a sleep study (sleep apnea, for example). However, if a child sleeps well when a parent is nearby and worse when a parent is not, the child's sleep problem is most likely more behavioral than medical in nature and one that could likely be solved with the 5-step guide in my book.

How has the availability of electronics and the use of electronics at young ages affected bedtime routines and quality of sleep in children? Do you address this in your book?

As you would imagine, electronics are a constant topic of discussion among sleep professionals. And, yes, screens have negatively affected bedtime routines and worsened children's sleep quality (and quantity) in so many ways. Screens mimic daylight and make the brain think that it is still daytime just when it is time to drift off to dreamland. They provide an endless source of stimulation and entertainment at bedtime, too. And, for older kids, they allow cyberbullies access to a child at bedtime. One of the best decisions a parent can make is to remove all screens from children's bedrooms and charge them under a parent's supervision overnight. I do address this topic in detail in my book.

What sort of implications do poor sleep habits in childhood have for later in life?**Teaching your child to be a great sleeper helps him or her become a great sleeper for life.**

Children who are poor sleepers often grow up to be adults who are poor sleepers. Teaching a child to be a great sleeper is an incredibly valuable skill and an important part of a parent's role. Parents make very effective sleep coaches for their kids once they know exactly what to do.