

Helping Your Child Be the Boss of Their Dreams

Many children have occasional nightmares. For children who have nightmares almost every night or several times a night, however, this can be very disruptive to the child's (and the caregivers') sleep. The following provides guidance on how to help your child be the boss of their dreams.

1. **Have your child describe a recent nightmare.** Ask for as many details as possible. What does your child see, hear, feel, smell, taste in the dream? What happens? Who is there?
2. **Have your child draw the dream** with as much detail as possible.
3. **Tell your child that they can learn to be the boss of their own dreams!** They can decide what they want to dream about.
4. **Have your child make up what they would rather dream about.** Again, what will happen in the new dream? What will your child see, hear, feel, smell, taste? Who will be there?
 - Some children will want to have the beginning of the same bad dream but change the ending to be more positive. For some kids, this can mean having control over the bad part of the dream. For example, a child who is afraid of being eaten by monsters may decide to have a new dream where they shrink the monster to the size of an ant and blow it away. Let your child be as creative as they like.
5. **Have your child draw the new dream with as much detail as possible.**
6. **Your child may want to tear up the drawing of the scary dream** and hang the drawing of the new dream above their bed.
7. **Have your child tell you about the new, positive dream several times during the day,** always remembering to use as much detail as possible. This may be easier if they can look at their drawing to remind them of all of the pieces of the new dream.
8. **Once they can describe the dream easily to you, have them start talking about the new dream just before they go to bed,** reminding them that they can be the boss of their dreams and tell their brain to dream about the new dream hanging over their bed.
9. **If your child wakes up from a nightmare during the night, provide brief comfort and then guide your child again in describing the new positive dream to you.**

If your child regularly practices describing new positive dreams during the day and before going to bed, in a short period of time they will have fewer nightmares. Once your child learns to be the boss of their dreams, they can also start to feel more confident in their ability to conquer fears.
