

Scheduled Awakenings for Parasomnias

Confusional arousals, sleep terrors, and sleepwalking are all known as *partial arousal parasomnias* (which means “partially awake and partially asleep”). Your child may behave as if they are awake, or they may seem confused or upset. But they are actually sleeping through these events. Even though they may say things that do not make sense, they are not dreaming or having a nightmare.

Scheduled awakenings are used for children who have a lot of predictable parasomnia events. This means at least several times per week and around the same time each night. The following provides advice on how to use scheduled awakenings with your child.

1. **For the next 2 weeks, keep track of your child’s sleep patterns.** You should record their bedtime, wake time, and when the parasomnia events happen.
2. **Scheduled awakenings should occur 15 to 30 minutes before they typically have their first event.** For example, if their average bedtime is 8:00 p.m. and their average sleep terror is at 9:30 p.m., the scheduled awakening time is between 9:00 and 9:15 p.m.
3. **At the scheduled awakening time, go in and gently wake your child** with a light touch or a soft verbal prompt.
4. **Once they are awake (i.e., opens their eyes, changes positions, and/or tells you that they are awake), allow them to return to sleep.**

Important Things to Remember

- If you cannot identify a consistent pattern for events, then you should not use scheduled awakenings.
- This is not a quick treatment! It usually takes 2 to 4 weeks of consistently waking your child at the same time every night for the parasomnia events to happen less often.
- If the scheduled awakening time is after you usually go to bed, you will have to set an alarm to wake you at the same time each night. This will help you be consistent about gently waking your child. (Although this feels like a disruption to your sleep, you will be waking up anyway when they have their event!)
- It is possible that you will trigger a sleep terror or sleepwalking event in your child by using scheduled awakenings. If this happens, do not interfere with the event or try to wake them. Instead, move the scheduled awakening time earlier by 15 minutes the next night.
- If your child has an event before the scheduled awakening time, move the time earlier by 15 minutes for subsequent nights.

Scheduled awakenings work well for children who have sleep terrors or sleepwalking events at the same time almost every night. However, this treatment can take 2 to 4 weeks, and you must be consistent every night for it to be effective.
