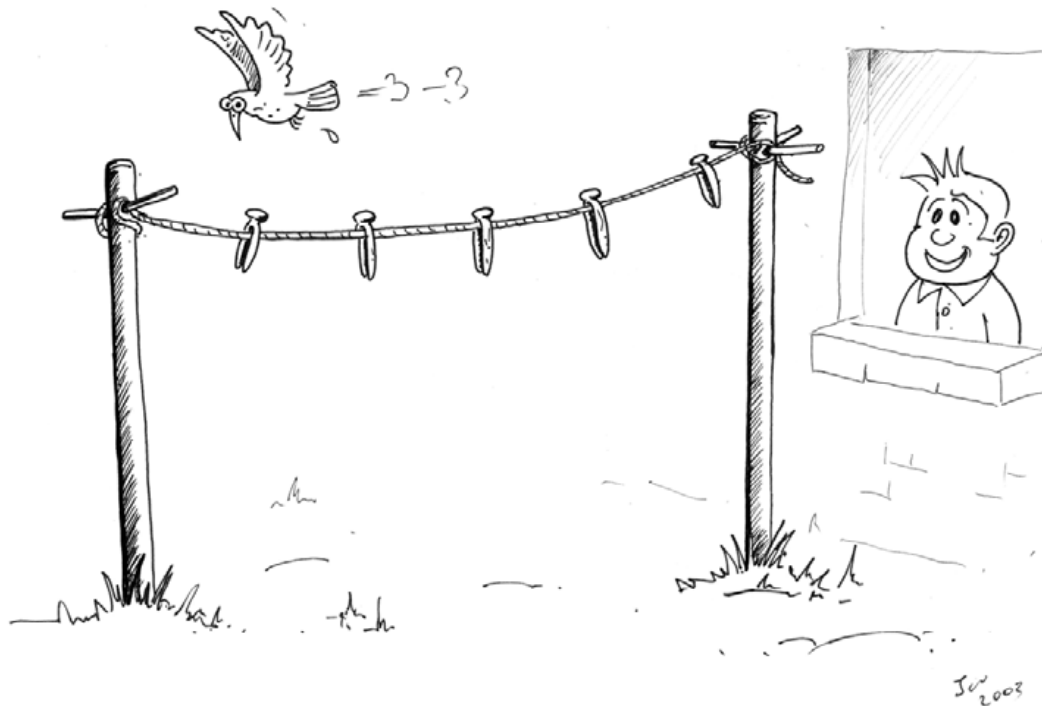


Helping a child who wets the bed

A guide for parents



**West Lothian Child and Adolescent
Mental Health Services
(CAMHS)**

Some facts about bedwetting

- Most 3-4 year old children occasionally wet the bed
- One in 10 children between 5-6 years of age frequently wet the bed
- One in eight children between 6-8 years and one in 20 of 10-12 year old children wet the bed
- Overall, twice as many boys as girls have bedwetting problems.

Bedwetting should not be viewed as a sign that the child is suffering from underlying emotional disturbance. We all learn how to do things at our own pace and in our own time.

Some children may wet themselves during the day. This is usually when they are busy doing other things, engrossed in play or excited by an event. You can usually avoid this problem by suggesting they use the toilet before they go out to play or reminding them after they have been out for a while.

Do not see your child's bedwetting as a problem, unless it has seriously begun to interfere with other activities. If your child has stopped staying overnight at a friend's house or refuses to go on school camps for fear of wetting the bed, then your child may be very motivated to do something about it. The main point to remember is to be patient and reassuring. If you are positive, your child will be too.

The main patterns of bedwetting in children

1: Children who have never learned to control their bladder at night – this tends to run in families. Parents of these children are 3 times more likely to have had a bedwetting problem when they were young. If both parents had a bedwetting difficulty when they were children, there is a 70% chance their child will also.

2: Children who have been dry at night, but later start to have wet beds again. This may be due to stress. Common life events that cause children stress are the birth of a new baby, physical illness,

divorce or a move to a new home or school. It is useful to remember that the most recently learned skill is most likely to be affected if there is added stress. This is usually temporary and goes away.

What will help?

- **Try not to make a fuss**

Worrying will make the problem worse. Giving the child rows, punishment or shaming them about the problem does not work. They are likely to be as upset as you are.

- **Reduce stress**

Try to calm the child down before bedtime. Set aside some time before the child goes to bed when they get the undivided attention of one or both parents. During this time your child might be able to discuss any worries they have or bad dreams they may have experienced.

- **Praise**

It is very important that you take time to praise your child if they have had a dry night. You can perhaps offer rewards for success as well. However, if they have accidents, you should make no fuss and remain calm.

- **Things that go bump in the night**

Imagine your house at night from your child's perspective. It might be that they are afraid to get up and go to the toilet because it is too dark, too cold, too noisy etc. Maybe you could leave a light on in the toilet or on the landing. Scary books and films before bedtime are not a good idea. Sometimes we are woken by strange unexplainable noises at night. Have you recently invested in a new heating system and the boiler rattles at night?

- **Regular visits to the toilet**

Encourage your child to go to the toilet as part of a regular bedtime routine and again just before going to bed.

- **Improve muscle control**

Just as we have learned to control other muscles in our body, we also have to learn to control our bladder. There are some easy exercises you can teach your child to improve muscle control. When the child goes to the toilet, encourage him/her to stop and start the flow of urine to strengthen the bladder muscles. A good

trick for boys is to put a ping pong ball in the toilet and get him to aim at it, stop, then aim again and so on.

● **Waking in time**

If there is a clear pattern to your child's bedwetting and you know exactly when they wet the bed, you could wake him/her up just beforehand. It is very useful to use an alarm clock.

For example, if he/she generally wets the bed three hours after going to sleep, set the alarm for 2¹/₂ hours after bedtime. After a week of dry nights, set the alarm for three hours, then 3¹/₂ hours and so on, until the alarm is no longer needed. This method will only work if your child wets the bed at the same time every night.

● **Bell and pad method**

This works really well, especially with older children. In fact it is usually only used for children 6-7 years of age and older. It aims to train the child how to recognise when their bladder is full.

Your Health Visitor, GP, Community Nurse or Psychologist will be able to supply you with a special training pad. There are two types of pad. The first is a sheet that goes underneath your child, and the other is a small sensor that fits into their underwear.

In both cases, when the sensor gets wet, a buzzer is set off and a light goes on to wake the child. When the child wakes up, they stop urinating and get up and go to the toilet. Many children need their parents to help, as it is common for children to sleep through the buzzer.

Other treatments

There are other ways to help bedwetting, such as medication and nasal sprays. You should contact your GP for more information on these. All the suggestions in this leaflet will be helpful to your child, even if you and your GP chose another form of treatment.

Some things to avoid

There are some strategies which research suggests are not very useful. Restricting the amount of fluids your child drinks does not really help. In addition, getting your child up to go to the toilet at a time that suits you, e.g. when you go to bed or someone gets in from work, will also not be effective. However, not giving your child

drinks with caffeine (such as Coke, tea or coffee) may have benefits.

Remember

If you don't make a fuss about the bedwetting and stay calm when using these strategies, you will have a good chance of beating the problem. Children do not want to wet their bed, but if they are made to feel bad or worried, the problem will usually get worse.

Praising children when they have been dry is very important. If you help them stay calm and feel good about themselves, everyone should soon be having peaceful, dry nights!



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