

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Parents Beware: Halloween Could Cause Nightmares or even Night Terrors in Children

5 Tips for Helping Children with Nightmares

PHOENIX, AZ- October 12th, 2010 – Halloween can be a fun time of year, but for many children it can be frightening. Costumes, decorations and scary movies can all contribute to frightening nightmares and even night terrors in children.

Children who experience night terrors can pose a danger to themselves or to others. Children who experience nightmares or night terrors may often sleep walk, or fall out of bed.

Nightmares and night terrors are two different things: Nightmares are dreams with vivid and disturbing content. They are common in children during REM sleep or the final phase of sleep just before the child wakes up. The dream may contain situations of danger, discomfort, psychological or physical terror. They usually involve an immediate awakening and good recall of the dream.

Night or sleep terrors are often described as extreme nightmares. Children experiencing night terrors may wake up from a deep sleep screaming and sweating. They may experience confusion, and a rapid heart rate. Most people who have night terrors have the, inability to explain what happened. They usually have no memory of the night terror on awakening the next day other than a vague sense of something extremely frightening. Many people also report seeing spiders, snakes, animals or people in the room with them.

Sleep expert, Patricia Day, of Valley Sleep Center, in Phoenix, Arizona, offers 8 tips for parents to help your child who experiences nightmares or night terrors.

1. **Wake them up gently!** Contrary to popular belief, it is not dangerous to wake a person who is sleepwalking. The sleepwalker simply may be confused or disoriented for a short time upon awakening. Although waking a sleepwalker is not dangerous, sleepwalking itself can be dangerous because the person is unaware of his or her surroundings and can bump into objects or fall down or even walk out the door!
2. **Avoid scary stories, movies, or other stimulus just before bed.** Our brains have a tendency to recall the last thing on our mind before we go to sleep, called the “recency effect,” so make sure that the last things that your child experiences or sees before going to sleep are pleasant, happy, and relaxing.



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3. **Some scary things should be avoided all together.** Haunted Houses, while fun for adults, can be terrifying for children who do not have a grasp on what's real and what's not. Even teens and young adults admit to experiencing nightmares after visiting haunted houses. Make sure that if you participate in a haunted house experience that it is age appropriate for your child. Help your child relax before bedtime by establishing a routine such as story time, teeth brushing etc.
4. **Make sure they are sleeping in a safe environment:** If your child sleeps in a bunk bed, put the child who experiences the nightmares in the bottom bunk. Even if there are rails in the top bunk, a nightmare sufferer can try to climb down in their sleep and fall down and get hurt. Make sure that there are no toys or other objects around the bed that can trip a person should they get out of bed. Keep their bedroom door open and the windows locked and closed.
5. **Establish a regular sleep schedule for your child** and make sure they are getting enough sleep. This will also help your child to perform better in school or daytime activities.
6. **Use a nightlight, but not too bright.** Bright light can actually interrupt sleep patterns and contribute to nightmares. Use a light that has very low lighting, and place it in an area of the room that provides the lowest possible lighting. Even putting the light in the hallway or bathroom with the door open is an option.
7. **And avoid eating heavy meals or strenuous exercise just before bed** which are also shown to contribute to nightmares. If your child must have something to eat before bed, focus on something light like fruits and vegetables or a sandwich.
8. **After your child has a nightmare, have them explain it to you.** Then walk them through it and help them understand that it's not real. Also, help them come up with a happy or funny alternative. For example, "Every time you see the monster in your dreams, imagine that he has the hiccups."

Nightmares are fairly common in children, so a parent shouldn't necessarily be alarmed. However if your child experiences nightmares on a regular basis, or has trouble sleeping, then you should talk to your doctor.

About Valley Sleep Center:

Since 2002, Valley Sleep Center, accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, has provided Arizona with diagnostic sleep disorder testing in a home-like atmosphere, ensuring a comfortable, relaxing experience for patients. Their Board Certified Sleep Medicine Specialists consist of experienced and knowledgeable physicians who provide expert advice across a multitude of sleep related disorders including insomnia, sleep apnea, snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness, hypertension, sleepwalking, and pediatric sleep problems. They accept most insurance plans as well as Medicare. For more information contact Valley Sleep Center at 480-830-3900; <http://www.valleysleepcenter.com>.



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