



Parents Partner

## TUTORIAL Bed wetting

### Bed wetting

Most children by the age of 2 to 3 years begin to stay dry at night. The transition from nappies to training pants to a consistently dry bed takes time.

Research indicates a significant number of 4 year olds (25%) and 5 year olds (15%) still wet the bed. These children are often misunderstood. A parent, in their frustration, can believe their child is deliberately wetting the bed and that it can be stopped by punishment. Other parents think their child is just too lazy to go to the toilet. Both attitudes are wrong. There are a number of possible reasons why a child wets the bed beyond the usual age.

- ▶ Small bladder.
- ▶ Physical immaturity. During children's toddler years they wet the bed simply because they are too immature to maintain night time bladder control.
- ▶ The child has a very deep sleep pattern which prevents them from waking when they need to get up and go to the toilet.
- ▶ In approximately 2% of bed wetting children the cause is a medical disorder.
- ▶ Emotional problems such as anxiety or depression. Any change in the psychological environment of the home can produce insecurity in a child that results in bed wetting.

### What to do ...

Firstly, don't be concerned by accidents that might occur. While it is an inconvenience, shaming or ridiculing your child for wetting the bed will not solve the problem; it could make it worse and might lead to more serious emotional problems.

<b>1</b>	Check with your family doctor to determine if there are any medical problems that might be causing the bed wetting. Although this would be unusual, it's always best to rule out physical conditions first before you try other solutions.
<b>2</b>	Keep a record of how often your child urinates during the day. Frequent urination of small amounts of liquid is an indication that your child's bladder might not have sufficient capacity to help him or her make it through the night.

<b>3</b>	Observe your child at night to determine how deep a sleeper he/she is, and if this is the cause of bed wetting.
<b>4</b>	If your child only wets the bed intermittently keep a record of events that occur around the time when they wet the bed. You could well find that it's at a time of excitement (like going to a child's birthday party the next day), or during times of stress in the family. Each child is different, so try to figure out if there is a pattern to your child's bed wetting.
<b>5</b>	If you think your child's bladder is not large enough, or strong enough to get him/her through the night have him/her practise starting and stopping their urine five times during each urination so they gain more awareness and control. Explain that this helps develop the muscle in their body that closes off the bladder at night, so they can stay dry longer.
<b>6</b>	If it's a real problem there are electronic devices that ring a bell and awaken the child when the urine completes an electrical circuit. This conditions a child to associate the feeling of needing to urinate with the bell that awakens him/her. This strategy can have dramatic results, so if the problem is chronic it's worth investigating.

It is very important that this child is not shamed, ridiculed or criticised. Finding a wet mattress and sheets can be very irritating! But shaming your child is guaranteed to not work. It will continue, or worsen the problem because of the inner stress it creates within the child. Children who wet the bed need a parent who is gentle and understanding. The worst response possible would be to criticise the child; criticism will never change it, but can do a lot of psychological damage.

### **Resources**

Read the following Parents Partner brochures for further insights and ideas:

*Raising a co-operative child*

*Changing Behaviour*

*Ian M.S. McKean  
Auckland.*

parentspartner@ihug.co.nz