

## ***When You're Too Tired to Deal with Your Kids***

"Tired minds don't plan well. Sleep first, plan later."—Walter Reisch and Charles Brackett, American writers

It's a too-common parenting myth: you think once your infant starts sleeping through the night, you'll be less exhausted. But the truth is, parenting has many moments that tax your system, cause you to lose sleep, and place demands on you that make you tired. Plus, when you add in your work, volunteerism, keeping up a home, and dealing with friends and family, you can often find yourself doing more than you should. So what can you do when you're too tired to deal with your kids? Try these ideas.

### ***Try it...***

#### ***For all parents***

- Pace yourself. Parenting is not a race. Think of it as a run that lasts forever. While it's true that active parenting is most intense while your children are living at home, you'll still find yourself parenting your adult children, depending on the choices they make after they move out.
- Take care of yourself. Figure out creative ways to get rest and to rejuvenate yourself. Some parents take short naps during the movie when they take their kids to the movie theater. Others cut back on their activities so they have a little down time (which often isn't easy to find when you're a parent).
- Know that you're not alone. Many parents feel tired because of our society's unrealistic expectations. Too many parents are working long hours, working more than one job, or being single parents who are trying to juggle everything.
- Talk with other parents. Learn how they get rest. See if you can trade off so that one parent is with the kids of two or three families while the other parents rest or take a break. This is especially helpful for single parents who often feel they don't have any breaks at all.
- Make sure your child is sleeping well, otherwise you won't be sleeping well. For ideas on how to help your child sleep through the night, read [\*The Sleep Book for Tired Parents\*](#) by Becky Huntley.
- When you're overly tired, you will not parent well. Your temper may flare easily. Your thinking may be muddled. If you're exhausted and your child is pushing your buttons, say you need a time out. (Kids are often surprised when their parents give themselves a time out.) Explain that once you've gotten some rest and perspective, you can deal with the situation that your child has brought to you.

#### ***For parents with children ages birth to 5***

- Whether you're a parent who works outside of the home or you're a stay-at-home

parent, you're going to get tired. If possible, take naps when your children nap, and remember, it's okay to leave dirty dishes in the sink or let some housework go. Put yourself first and get some rest when you can.

- Once your children outgrow naps, continue to have a daily “quiet time” if your child is at home with you, or at the child care center if you work. Turn out the lights. Allow children to have a flashlight and use their “whisper voices” and allow them to do quiet activities, such as looking at picture books or playing very quietly. While your children have a quiet time, you can do the same. Consider meditating or taking a short nap.
- Find someone you can trust to give you occasional breaks. Maybe a grandparent or an uncle will spend time with your child while you rest or catch up on things. Or maybe you can get a referral from a friend about a great baby-sitter who loves kids.
- Young children are notorious for waking up earlier than their parents want them to. Consider getting your child a digital clock to place near your child's bed. Write the appropriate wake-up time on a piece of paper and post it near the clock. Your children don't need to be able to tell time, but they can practice matching the numbers. Explain that if they wake up before the numbers on the clock match the numbers on the paper, they can play quietly in their room. Then when the numbers match, they can wake you up.

### ***For parents with children ages 6 - 9***

- Although children at this age still need supervision, you can take a 15- to 20-minute nap while they're in the house during the day. Lock all the doors and be clear that your children are not to answer the door or go outside. Explain that you need some quiet, rest time. At first, your kids may interrupt you, but if you continue doing this on a regular basis, they'll quickly catch on and respect your wishes to take a break.
- Encourage extended family members (and family friends you trust) to spend time with your children. Not only is this great for your kids, but it's also important for you to have a much-needed break. When your kids are away, put yourself first. Nap. Take a walk. *Then* look at your to-do list.
- Don't be surprised if your children send you into a short-term sleep deprivation period when they get sick, have a series of nightmares, or hit a stressful period in their lives when they can't sleep. They will wake you up, and it's important to care for them in the middle of the night.

### ***For parents with children ages 10 - 15***

- Sleepovers often become “stay-up-all-night” events for this age group. Be firm about rules regarding leaving the house and quiet times. If they are noisy and cause you to lose sleep, take away their sleepover privileges for a while. Some parents even set a time limit for lights out (such as at midnight) and say that kids can continue to talk quietly with flashlights but can't be roaming around the house after that time.
- As kids start to go through puberty, their sleep schedules tend to change. They become more nocturnal and can sleep until noon (or later). When this starts to happen, emphasize how your child needs to respect the other sleep habits of other family members. Many parents have to get up early to go to work (or do other activities), and they need a good night's sleep—as does everyone else in the house.
- Since this is a time when many kids question authority that can create a lot of tension in your home, which can also make you tired. Find ways to care for yourself so that your nerves aren't always shot. Take a hot bath. Shoot some hoops. Work

out at the gym. Go for walks. Do yard work to relax. Read funny novels. Do what you can to take care of yourself.

### ***For parents with children ages 16 - 18***

- As teenagers become more independent, you may find yourself having trouble sleeping, particularly if they're out late (and driving your car) or are on a date (and you're wondering what they're doing). Talk with other parents about how they handle the stress and worry of parenting older teenagers. You'll quickly discover you're not alone.
- Model how to take care of yourself. Older teenagers often are testing to see how far they can push their bodies in regards to sleep, eating, activity, and so on. Talk about how it's important to have downtime in addition to activity. Explain how you feel when you don't get enough sleep. Then model a healthy, balanced lifestyle for your teenager to observe.
- Don't be surprised if you discover your activity levels need to change as teenagers get older. Many parents find themselves overwhelmed when their teenagers become involved in a sports team, a musical group, or are considering college. (For tips on how to maneuver the exhausting college application process, read the article, [Parent-to-Parent: Staying Sane During the College Application Process](#)). Realize that you'll have more time once your teenager leaves the house, so it's okay to let go of some of your personal activities until later. Pacing is the key to parenting well.