

# Tips for Happier Mornings

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## *Getting yourself organised for the morning - Ideas to try*

- Get up 15 minutes earlier than your children to invest in what gets you off to a good start.
- Spiritual activities eg. prayer or Meditation, inspirational reading, mindfulness
- A peaceful cup of coffee or tea
- Stretches and deep breathing
- Relaxing music
- Childfree shower or bath!
- A brisk walk or use of your home exercise equipment
- Read the paper
- Be as organised as you can for yourself the night before.
- Plan your clothes- are they ready to throw on?
- Check the essentials - are they where they should be? e.g. keys, phones, money
- Pack your handbag so that you are ready to grab it.
- Review the calendar for what the day needs to have done.
- Write any reminders where you can't miss them. (A magnetic white board for the fridge works wonders)

## *Children Awake without a Fuss*

### 1. Adequate Length of Sleep

Opinions vary on the exact amount of sleep required for school aged children. The range though is between 9 to 13 hours depending on several factors. You, of course, know what works for your child. If we use 10 hours as a rough average, it is easy to see that setting a consistent bedtime the night before is essential to allow enough sleep to occur. So if you want your 10 year old child to be awake by 7 am they will need to be asleep by 9 pm the night before. Of course the actual bedtime is usually well before this to allow time for falling asleep.

### 2. Motivation

Motivation is a powerful force. Use it to your advantage (and your child's!) to help them want to bounce out of bed. Of course what works for one child may not impress another. Each child will have their own preferences and drives. For older children ask them to tell you what would it take for them to enjoy getting up in the morning.

Here are some ideas and concepts to consider:

Do they like...

- Food? Have breakfast waiting and preferably smelling!
- Movement? If they enjoy physical activity they might look forward to using exercise equipment with supervision, going for a short walk with you or having fun with the Wake Up Shake Up activities.
- Time to Play? If they can get out of bed quickly and get ready on time, see if they can squeeze in even 5 minutes of play with their toys or siblings.
- Novelty? When our children were small they loved to get up and see what PB Bear was doing outside their bedroom door. We had positioned him the night before in a different pose or with different clothes. What weird family ritual can you come up with?
- Reward Systems? This may link into other behavioural incentive schemes you might be using. Getting out of bed without fuss can count for points that link to rewards. Or it might link to a loss of privileges if there is a fuss. The choice between positive and negative systems depends on what works with your child and your family's viewpoint.

## *Older Children*

- Alarms

Using an alarm clock is an important step in your child's growing independence. With it comes more responsibility and the skills of clock reading, learning to plan and checking those plans! It might be just the solution for children who are resistant to others telling them what to do! Let the alarm do the talking or squawking!

There are lots of options for what type of alarm to use. Some children and teens really respond to the jolt of an artificial noise to get them wide awake. They may have no choice, especially if you have the alarm positioned well away from arm's reach. On the other hand, waking up to their favourite music on radio or CD might just be a better start to their day. Just watch out for what is effective. The snooze function can be all too tempting, though, so you still need to specify that you expect them to actually get up.

- Consequences

Older children need to understand the consequences of not getting up on time. If sleeping in an extra twenty minutes means that they miss the bus chances are they might think twice before letting that happen again. Of course the hardest part is letting the consequences do their work. If we step in and save the day, the opportunity for learning is lost. One brave parent made good their threat that if their ten year old wouldn't get up on time, she would

drive him to school regardless of their state of dress. Needless to say, that boy only appeared in his PJ's once at the school gates.

## *Waking up sleeping children*

- Increase Light

Light is a powerful signal to the brain that it's time to change from the sleep cycle to full consciousness. If it's dark outside, using daylight bulbs in lamps can help simulate the effect of early morning light. Drawing the curtains in summer helps flood the brain with those wake up signals.

- Change the Temperature

Draw back the covers for a quick drop in temperature. This too, signals to the brain that a change in state is required! Some people go to extremes with icy water but hopefully you don't need such drastic measures. Mind you, a day or two of an icy cold flannel about the face might just convince slack sleepers to change their habits.

- Small Talk

Simple but effective! Talk to your child and get them to talk back. Hopefully a clear sign that they are indeed awake. Early morning chats can be a loving start to the day. It only needs to be a couple of simple statements but you are showing you care about how they slept and hopefully getting off on the right foot together. A cheery "Good morning " sets the tone amidst grunts and groans!

- Sing

Regardless of talent, parents seem to be able to get away with singing to their children. Well, for a while anyway. Then the embarrassment factor works in your favour as well. ("OK, OK I'll get up, just stop singing!!!!) Maybe you could have a family favourite wake up song or be inventive and try something different every day.

- Touch

Try different forms of gentle touch to get your child awake. Depending on their sensory profile they may enjoy tickles, touches, cuddles, pats or strokes. With care you might try something that they tolerate but don't particularly enjoy, just to get them to reach that awake state. Be guided by their reactions as to how long to persist. Change over to what they enjoy more once they show they are alert enough not to fall back asleep.

- Positive Environment

Just sometimes there might be something going on in your household that means your child might not want to be in a hurry to greet the day. A noisy argument or blaring news broadcasts might be overwhelming. Some children are very sensitive to particular noise levels and if there are people's emotions involved, there are added issues. Where possible be aware of what sort of atmosphere your household is creating. See if you can make changes where you can to have the best background to wake up to.

### *Everyone Dressed and Prepared for The Day Ahead*

Basically, it's getting everyone organised and looking decent for the day ahead. Whether it's off to childcare or school, once you are out that door hopefully there's no turning back until the end of the day. The secret to stress free exits is lots of behind the scenes preparation and good old routine. Last minute problems are just part of life, but getting the essentials working every day, will reduce the morning mayhem.

### *Shake Up Essentials*

- Clean and Presentable Clothes available

Unless you have the washing fairy at your place, this never ending task still takes forever, even in the 21st Century. Even if you are just keeping your head above the suds from one day to the next, making sure the next day's clothes requirements are ready is an essential task. Check calendars for special events like sports days and swimming lessons.

Even toddlers can learn to put their dirty clothes in the laundry hamper (or wherever you stash the eternal mountain!). Let older children help in the washing process- more on that in Joyful Jobs.

- Personal Care Tasks Done

There's a multitude of things that need to get done in the morning and sometimes it just seems that the work will never end. Training children to become independent takes precious time but will ultimately save your sanity. If weekdays are absolutely frantic, try to invest in training opportunities on the weekend. This especially goes for tricky jobs like tying shoelaces, toileting, dressing, grooming and cleaning teeth/washing face.

- School Materials and Food Packed

What can you or your children pack ahead the night before?

Homework books, folders and worksheets

Notes to be returned to school

PE Kit or other items to be changed into at school

- Routine

Children work best with routine. Knowing what is expected of them and what will happen next provides security and logic to their world. Teachers can usually tell which children in their class have a regular morning routine or come from homes where it is very haphazard. Children with special needs such as Attention Deficit Disorder or Developmental Co-ordination Disorder really benefit from learning a morning routine. Of course the more people in your household the more complex your routines, especially if you are juggling bathroom time. Sometimes it's just the youngest ones in the family that need that little bit of help to get their own routine established.

### *Suggested Activities*

Crab Walk	
Why do it?	Enhances muscle tone, arm joint position awareness, movement planning.
Where?	Some floor space away from stairs.
What do we need?	Body
How?	Child squats down and places their hands behind them. Walk along backwards keeping bottom off the ground.
Challenge?	Move around obstacles or do circuits around something like a chair.
Change it?	Can you go forwards or sideways?
Watch it?	Adults should only demonstrate this. (We're too big to do this for too long!).

Bunny Hop	
Why do it?	Enhances muscle tone, arm joint position awareness, movement planning.
Where?	Some floor space away from stairs.
What do we need?	Body
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child squats down</li><li>• Places their hands well out in front of them. These are the 'paws'.</li><li>• Leave paws on the floor, while leaning forward and hopping feet towards them.</li><li>• Continue this sequence of paws, feet, paws, feet.</li></ul>
Challenge?	Move around obstacles. How many hops can you do?
Change it?	Can you go forwards or sideways?
Watch it?	Adults should only demonstrate this. (We're too big to do this for

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Silly Walks	
Why do it?	A fun way to get out of bed and moving! Movement planning.
Where?	From bed to the next place eg Bathroom.
What do we need?	Body, Optional silly hats or other props etc.
How?	Think of a silly way to walk eg criss cross legs whilst walking; tippy toes whilst being an elephant, flap your elbows and waddle like a duck. Encourage your child to imitate you as they follow you to where you want them to go.
Challenge?	Keep coming up with something different every day. Surprise your child with how crazy you can be.
Change it?	Add in silly animal noises etc.
Watch it?	Watch out for obstacles and nosy neighbours.

Windmills	
Why do it?	Stretches arm muscles, crosses midline of body, uses left and right sides of the brain.
Where?	Some floor space away from stairs.
What do we need?	Body
How?	Both arms make large circles crossing over in front of the body.
Challenge?	Can you do this with your eyes closed?
Change it?	If this is too hard to begin with, gently move your child's arm through the position until they can do it for themselves.
Watch it?	Watch out for obstacles

Bubble Clap	
Why do it?	Eye Hand Co-ordination, Visual Attention, successful play.
Where?	In bed or out! If out, a small amount of cleared space.
What do we need?	Bubble mix and wand, hands.
How?	Gently blow bubbles upwards so your child can watch them float slowly down Get your child to clap them with both hands.
Challenge?	Can you pop them all before they land on the floor or the bed?
Watch it?	Be aware of obstacles.

Wheelbarrows	
Why do it?	Fun way to get children moving out of the bedroom etc. Enhances tone and joint position awareness, shoulder stability.
Where?	Anywhere there is a flat, safe surface to walk on your hands!
What do we need?	Space, hands.
How?	Child kneels down on hands and knees.

	<p>Tell them that they are going to be the wheelbarrow and walk using their hands on the floor, while you hold their legs to be the “pusher”.</p> <p>Explain that if they need to stop they must say “STOP!” and you will let them gently down.</p> <p>Count out loud each step.</p>
Challenge?	See if you can increase your total number of steps
Watch it?	Don't do this if you have a weak back! Can someone else do this with your child?