

Bereavement and the onset of bedwetting

The frequency of bedwetting can be affected by stress and anxiety and the behaviours that these emotions and feelings result in. Children may drink fluids right up to their bedtime if they are upset to rehydrate themselves.

Similar to adults, children may seek the comfort of food, an increase in the ingestion of salty foods results in the body retaining more fluids; consequently wetting the bed becomes more likely.

Bedwetting mostly occurs in children who are deep sleepers, if the child has been stressed they may be sleep deprived. When a child falls asleep after sleep deprivation they end up going into an even deeper sleep, therefore they are less likely to wake up if they need to go to the toilet.

How to help children overcome bedwetting

- Reassure your child that bedwetting isn't their fault and that it is ok, they won't always wet their bed.
- Encourage your child to use the toilet just before going to bed.
- You could also use nightlights to help illuminate the route the child needs to take to get to the toilet, if the child does wake up and needs to go to the bathroom this will make it easier for them.
- Reward your child for trying to stay dry even if they do wet the bed. Give praise even when accidents do occur as this should help to reassure them and keep anxiety about going to bed to a minimum.
- To reduce major dietary changes when children are stressed you could try giving a sensory toy to help keep them busy and reduce the likelihood of them craving salty foods.
- Worry dolls may also be helpful for children who are anxious about bedwetting, putting these dolls next to the child's bed may help to reduce their anxious thoughts and feelings.

Supporting your Child with Sleep Difficulties and Bedwetting



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A bereaved child may find it difficult to fall asleep or struggle to stay asleep for the duration of the night, regardless of how tired they are. These difficulties may arise because they are worried that they may not wake up again, that their caregiver won't be there when they wake up or they may be anxious that they will have nightmares.



It is helpful if you can talk to your child and together try to work out why they cannot fall asleep.

'I just can't...' may be their initial response, try to explore this further, asking questions such as 'what will happen when you fall asleep?' and 'how will you feel when you wake up in the morning after having a full nights sleep?'. These questions can help the child to think about the concerns they have and then together you can develop strategies to try and manage these feelings.

It is common for children to worry that sleeping is like dying—reassure your child that for anyone to die it has to be very serious and sleeping is about rest which is important for our bodies to be healthy- it is very different.

Techniques that may help your child to fall asleep

- Reading a book with your child at bedtime may help them to feel less anxious and therefore more likely to settle down. If your child has a favourite book then this could be read together. Alternatively a book with a focus on bereavement may help them to understand what has happened, 'Water Bugs and Dragonflies', 'The Invisible String' or 'When Dinosaurs Die' may be good options.
- Sitting with your child until they fall asleep may be a short-term technique to help them fall asleep. It is important to tell them that you will be going to another room when they have fallen asleep, otherwise if they wake up and you aren't there this may cause them anxiety.
- Children may wish to fall asleep with a night light or baby monitor on - reassure your child that you are in the home and can be woken up if they need you. This reassurance is often sufficient in reducing anxiety and helping children to fall asleep.
- Some children may like wrap themselves in a certain blanket or may find a weighted blanket comforting.
- The use of lavender oil on their pillowcase may help them to feel calm and would increase the likelihood of them getting a restful sleep.
- If nightmares are a concern for your child it may be helpful to make a dream catcher together. These can be made from materials such a paper plate and string. The process of making a dream catcher can be therapeutic and help your child to think differently about sleep.

