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Worry Time

Meltzer / McLaughlin "Pediatric Sleep Problems - A Clinician's Guide"

We all know that we need to be relaxed to fall asleep. Worrying at bedtime makes it hard to relax, which will then make it very difficult to fall asleep. Children who are "worriers" can spend most of their day and night worrying or asking parents to help them put aside their worries. Worry Time helps children understand that they can set aside time for their brain to worry and free up the rest of their day and bedtime for more helpful, relaxing thoughts. The following provides guidance on how to do Worry Time with your child.

1. **Set aside time each day for your child to worry.** Your child should worry _____ times per day for _____ minutes each.
2. **Together with your child, decide when this time should be** (although it should not be right before bedtime). For example, some children may choose to use the 15 minutes before dinner as their Worry Time. Your child's Worry Time will be _____

3. **Your child may choose to worry alone or with you there.**
4. **During Worry Time, your child can think, write down, or tell you about any and all worries.** You and/or your child may spend much of that time problem solving how to best address those worries.
5. **Any other time that your child begins to worry, give a reminder that this worry will need to wait for the next Worry Time.**

Important Things to Remember

- It may seem a little bit strange to a child who worries to be asked to "worry as much as you can." The purpose of Worry Time is to help your child learn to set aside worries during other times of the day. Once she learns to do that, your child learns to control the worrying better.
- After a short time (1–2 weeks), many children will begin to run out of worries during Worry Time. If you find that is the case, use the time to do something fun with your child: Play a game together, talk about your day, or go for a walk together. This can become special time between you and your child.
- Some children like to have a more concrete way to manage their worries. You can have your child write down the worries and place them in a box to "lock them

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away” for the rest of the day. Then, at the next Worry Time, your child can pull the worries back out of the box to see if they are still worried about it.

Worry Time can help your child learn to stop the worries throughout the day and at bedtime. By telling themselves, “I can worry about this later,” children can be freed to have more positive, helpful thoughts. When children are able to stop worrying at bedtime, they will start to fall asleep much more easily.