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## Helping Your Child be the Boss of her Dreams

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

Many children have occasional nightmares. For children who have nightmares almost every night or several times a night, however, this can be very disruptive to the child's (and the parents') sleep. The following provides guidance on how to help your child be the boss of her dreams.

1. **Have your child describe a recent nightmare.** Ask for as many details as possible. What does your child see, hear, feel, smell, taste in the dream? What happens? Who is there?
2. **Have your child draw the dream with as much detail as possible.**
3. **Tell your child that she can learn to be the boss of her own dreams!** She can decide what she wants to dream.
4. **Have your child make up what she would rather dream about.** Again, what will happen in the new dream? What will your child see, hear, feel, smell, taste? Who will be there?
  - Some children will want to have the beginning of the same bad dream but change the ending to be more positive. For some kids, this can mean having control over the bad part of the dream. For example, a child who is afraid of being eaten by monsters may decide to have a new dream where she shrinks the monster to the size of an ant and blows it away. Let your child be as creative as she likes.
5. **Have your child draw the new dream with as much detail as possible.**
6. **Your child may want to tear up the drawing of the scary dream and hang the drawing of the new dream above her bed.**
7. **Have your child tell you about the new, positive dream several times during the day,** always remembering to use as much detail as possible. This may be easier if she can look at her drawing to remind her of all of the pieces of the new dream.
8. **Once she can describe the dream easily to you, have her start talking about the new dream just before she goes to bed,** reminding her that she can be the boss of her dreams and tell her brain to dream about the new dream hanging over her bed.
9. **If your child wakes up during the night having a nightmare, provide brief comfort and then guide your child again in describing the new positive dream to you during the night.**

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*If your child regularly practices describing new positive dreams during the day and before going to bed, in a short period of time she will have far fewer nightmares. Once your child learns to be the boss of her dreams, she can start to feel more confident in her ability to conquer fears.*