



## Understanding and Handling Bedwetting

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Across the United States each night, about 6 million children go to the bathroom, are tucked in to bed, go to sleep, and at some time during their sleep, they wet their beds. Wetting the bed is a very common condition in children and some adolescents. Parents sometimes become worried about the issue of bedwetting in children after the age of 4 or 5, but simple sleep-wetting in children under age 6 is so common that it doesn't call for special action. The medical name for bedwetting is "enuresis". Enuresis has nothing to do with how a child is taught to use the toilet, nor is it an indication of physical or emotional problems. Parents should realize that children rarely wet on purpose and are usually embarrassed when they wake up in a wet bed.

### Facts parents should know about bedwetting:



- Children do not wet the bed on purpose.
- Approximately 15 percent of children wet the bed after the age of three.
- Many more boys than girls wet their beds.
- Bedwetting runs in families.
- Usually bedwetting stops by puberty.
- Most bedwetters do not have emotional problems.
- It is normal for there to be gaps between daytime and nighttime bladder control.
- Most children outgrow wetting the bed by the time they go to school.
- Understand that children do not wet the bed on purpose.
- Be patient and sensitive; children's bodies have to develop before they will have bladder control all night.
- Limit liquids before bedtime so the bladder isn't too full.
- Encourage your child to go to the bathroom before bedtime.
- Wake up your child during the night to go to the bathroom.
- Provide toddler pull-up diapers or other protective, moisture-absorbing underwear.
- Put a moisture-proof pad on the bed.
- Praise your child when he wakes up dry.
- Do not punish or tease your child when she wakes up wet.

### Things parents can do to help bedwetters:



“Bed-wetting does not stop magically at age four or six, and some counts indicate 25 percent of seven to ten-year-olds still wet at night. It is common, yet embarrassing and not often openly discussed. It happens with both boys and girls, and gender does not alter the recommended approach. Discuss this concern with your family pediatrician at your child’s annual physical. He [or she] will reassure you and your child that bed-wetting is common.”

Source: Karen Renshaw Joslin, *Positive Parenting from A to Z*, 1994.

## Why do children wet the bed?

- The most common reason is lack of physical development. Children’s bodies develop at different times. Some children have small bladders that need to be emptied more frequently, and until they develop more control of their muscles, wetting accidents will happen—both day and night.
- Some children are very deep sleepers and simply do not wake up when their bladders are full. Often, wetting the bed awakens the child, but it is too late to stop the flow of urine.
- Bed-wetting may be an inherited problem. If one or both parents were bedwetters as children, then it is likely that their children will be bedwetters. They, too, will outgrow this condition.
- It is possible that the child has a bladder or kidney problem, allergies, or some other minor physical problem that needs a doctor’s attention. To set your mind at ease and to help your child, it would be a good idea to make an appointment with your family doctor to explore the problem.



## Important Points to Remember:

- Wetting the bed is a common condition for children who may not have accidents during the day.
- Parents and other family members need to be calm about such accidents that are a natural part of childhood development.
- Bed wetting should not be cause for anger on the part of the parents or shame on the part of the child.
- Do not ridicule, tease, or punish your child when she wets the bed. This only makes the situation worse and reduces her feelings of self-worth.
- Show faith that in time, he will be able to sleep through the night without wetting the bed—it’s all part of growing up.
- Use pull-up diapers, waterproof underpants, and a waterproof-pad that will help protect the mattress.

*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*