

## Sleep and Potty Learning Q and A with Dr. Laura Markham

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:00 Hello. This is Dr. Laura Markham. In this audio, I'll be answering some of the most common questions that parents ask about sleep learning and potty learning. Remember, we're always applying our three big ideas. We start by regulating our own emotions and behavior, then we connect with our child. Finally, instead of trying to control our child, we coach them to be their best self, both by helping them with their emotions and by creating an environment where the child can thrive. Let's see how to apply these three big ideas to daily life with children.

### SLEEP QUESTIONS

(Please note: POTTY LEARNING questions begin at Question #44)

#### Question 1:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:00:41 A parent is saying, "Our kid needs a nap or he has meltdowns in the evening, but he's four, and we can't get him down for a nap." I would say if your child is four, there's no way you're going to get him down for a nap. I just wouldn't do it. I mean, there are four-year-olds who settle for naps, and if you've got one of those, power to you. That's great, and you're lucky. Count your blessings. But I would just say your child needs to go to bed earlier no matter what, for now, and gradually he'll be able to stay up longer in the evening, but right now, if he needs to not take a nap, he needs to maybe go to bed at 6:30.

#### Question 2:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:01:14 So another question is about early waking, "We give him a hug when he wakes up early, but then we have him go to his room just to play by himself, and he starts screaming. We tell him he has to play by himself til the sun goes up,

but we're too exhausted. He also wakes his brother up." Do you have blackout curtains? Do you have a noise machine? Do you play with him for half an hour every day to get him laughing? If not, often the anxiety comes up, and they wake up when they get to enough rest, not enough to be rested, but enough rest that they're not in a deep enough sleep, basically, so they wake up early. I would say it's probably too much to ask a four-year-old to go back to bed himself, most four-year-olds, but if he's getting himself up at 5:00 AM most mornings, I would leave no stone unturned to find out why he's getting up.

### Question 3:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:02:12

A parent is saying that, "Our four-year-old falls asleep at bedtime only when we're in the room, and he falls asleep at 9:00 PM. He always goes out of his room and goes to our room if we don't stay with him." This is all on my website. There's a whole article about how to handle this. It's in the toddler section, but it's totally appropriate for a four-year-old.

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ages-stages/toddlers/helping-your-toddler-learn-to-put-himself-to-sleep>

Basically you just stay at the door of his room on your chair, and you're boring as he falls asleep. Over time, he will learn to fall asleep. But make sure you're doing the roughhousing every day, because if not, it may be super hard for him to settle. The other option, if you have a child who's finding it hard to settle, is to get an audio that they listen to at night. There are a lot of audios out there that are specifically designed for bedtime, and children love to listen to them, and it helps them learn to put themselves to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Go ahead and get an audio that he likes. Let him listen to it every night. You can sit in the chair and listen to something else on your phone, like an audiobook, and don't let him get out of bed. When he gets out of bed, you

just return him to bed. Follow the advice on the website and let him listen to something so that he gradually becomes able to fall asleep on his own.

#### Question 4:

Parent: 00:03:33 I read a little bit online about toddlers and the sleeping rituals that you've suggested. I have a five-year-old and three-year-old, and they both like to sleep on their floor with just a blanket and a pillow in the corner, but then they sometimes rotate corners. What do you think about that? Do you think I should push to have them in their actual bed, or is it no problem letting them just kind of sleep in the corner wherever they want?

Dr. Laura Markham: Do they sleep well in the corner?

Parent: No.

Dr. Laura Markham: Well, that might be an argument to put them in a bed if they're not sleeping well there. If it's hard and it's waking them, they may not sleep well there. I could see thinking, "Well maybe they really need to be in a bed." The other question is whether the bed should go in the corner.

Parent: That's an idea too, putting mattress on the floor.

Dr. Laura Markham: Yeah. My kids slept on mattresses on the floor when they were that age, and they loved it. I think it often is more cozy for a kid than being in a bed, which is higher up. But they may want it in a corner because that feels cozy also. You might experiment.

Parent: Thank you.

Dr. Laura Markham: You're welcome.

#### Question 5:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:04:48 A parent is saying, "I can't get my six-year-old to go to bed in his own bed and sleep there. He will only fall asleep with

me in my bed. Also, I can't play with him all day long. He yells and screams that he can't just be on the iPad or playing with me, because he wants someone to play with." That's so sad, because it sounds like he needs playmates. He's letting you know he needs other kids, and he shouldn't just be home by himself all day. One thing I would work on is getting more playmates. I would not let him use the iPad all day, by the way. I agree with you. That's not a good idea. I would see if you can find other things he likes to do. The more he uses the iPad, the less he's going to find other things he likes to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

About sleeping in his own bed, you have to teach him how to fall asleep by himself. You just have to decide that's what you're going to do. You have to announce that's what's going to happen. You have to talk with him about it. You have to be clear about the limit, and you have to teach him. It's hard, but summer is a great time to do it, and by fall he can fall asleep in his own bed. This whole process is detailed on my website, and it's actually in the toddler section, but it applies to all aged kids. You do your bedtime routine, you hold your kid until he falls asleep, but you do it in his bed, not yours. Once he's used to falling asleep that way, the next phase is to touch him but not hold him. Then eventually he can fall asleep with you just holding his hand or putting your hand on his forehead.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Anyway it's a just a very gradual process like this, and you'll see on the article, and you'll find he backslides some days. That's okay. As long as the next day you go back to your program, that's all right. One day he really has to have you get in bed and hold him, do it. That's okay, but then the next day you're back to just holding his hand or whatever. He can learn to do this. He's old enough that he can learn to do it. He's six already, but it can happen slowly.

### Question 6:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:06:49

A parent is asking about her son, who's five, and how it's a big trigger for her when he hits and then he starts

laughing. The parent says, "He's trying to tell us something, but with dinner to make and housework to do, I can't be present with them all the time. I've been doing special time for a while, and he just wants more of me. I'm usually very tired from my 21-month-old waking me all night. I parent alone 12 hours a day, six days a week." Oh, I hear how overwhelmed you are, and I know what it's like to have a baby wake you up all night. It's pretty hard to stay patient the next day and feel like you have enough to go around.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So you might even want to tackle this before you tackle your five-year-old hitting, because the truth is you can't give your five-year-old what he needs until the 21-month-old is sleeping better.

A 21-month-old does not need to wake up all night. I hear you're waking up all night with him, but he does not need to wake up all night. A 21-month-old can eat enough solid food so they don't have to eat at night, and they don't need to wake up at night.

The reason that they wake up is because they are looking for us, because we rocked them to sleep or nursed them to sleep or held them to sleep or whatever we did. They're looking for us because they get to that point in a sleep cycle where they're sleeping very shallowly, and they are almost awake, and they reach out for us and we're not there, so they look for us. Or if they had a nipple in their mouth or a bottle or whatever, they look for that, a pacifier. They wake up looking for the thing that helped them fall asleep before, because they're trying to go back to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The way to help your 21-month-old not wake up looking for you all night is to help him learn to fall asleep by himself. There may be some crying, but there will not be abandoning him to his room to have him cry. There's no reason you can't do this with a 21-month-old. Now, I know you didn't ask me for advice about his sleep, but you are saying that you're usually very tired and you don't have energy for your five-year-old.

Of course, it's necessary to go to your 21-month-old if he's waking up at night. Of course, you go to your child, but there are ways to make his waking up much less likely, and if you're allowing conditions to prevail as you put him to bed, rocking him or whatever so that he wakes you all night long, you're making it so hard for you to be the parent your boys need you to be during the day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You deserve better sleep, and your five-year-old deserves a mom who can show up for him, and your 21-month-old is not necessarily gaining anything by waking up all night. He really doesn't need to do that. That's my opinion, but I don't know anyone who would disagree with that, actually, professionally.

On my website in the toddler section, there's "Helping Your Toddler Learn to Fall Asleep by Himself." That's the article. If you look at it, you can start to work with that. I, by the way, do not encourage people to do this before 15 months, because I don't think they're getting enough solid food into them, and I think they might be hungry. But you can always start, even at 15 months, you can start helping your child fall asleep without nursing or having a bottle or being rocked.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You can even do this with a nine-month-old or a seven-month-old. As long as you're with the child, you can put the child in the crib and keep your hands on the child and settle them. Every time they start to get up, you can settle them down.

They may really protest because they don't like this idea, but as long as they've been fed and as long as they have a secure relationship with you, you stay there, you don't walk out of the room, you don't take your hands off them, you're right there with them and you reassure them that it's okay, but it's bedtime. The first time you do this your child might cry for an hour and a half as you're settling him down in the crib, or if you co-sleep in the bed. But your child can learn to go to sleep without nursing or a bottle or being rocked or being walked around. Your hands, of course, will be on the child, but over time you'll find it'll

only be an hour and a half the first night. It'll get steadily less and less.

After a while, your child will go right to sleep and you put them in the crib or the bed, and you won't even have to have your hand on them. After a while ... I always say a while. It could be weeks and weeks, but after a while, you won't have to stay in the room. This is a wonderful thing to start when your child is young enough that they can't even stand up yet, like with a seven-month-old, and they learn much more quickly. But remember, you're still going to the child that young in the middle of the night. A 21-month-old, you would still go to also, but you don't need to feed them in the middle of the night, whereas the seven-month-old or even a 14-month-old, you do need to feed in the middle of the night if they wake up and they're hungry. But because you put them to bed without nursing them or getting them a bottle or walking or whatever, they're more likely to sleep, and they'll really only wake up if they are hungry. That's the basics of sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I just want to say again, we all know what it's like to be that exhausted, and I'm so sorry. Any kind of self-care you can do and any kind of help you can get is really important. I urge you to remember that you're feeling depleted, and that means your son isn't necessarily getting what he needs. That doesn't mean there's something wrong with you. It means you need to give yourself more support, and that's why I'm suggesting sleep would be the place to start.

### Question 7:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:12:00

A parent says, "My four-year-old takes two hours to fall asleep. We have to lie with her. It's because we turn off the lights, the party begins, and she starts to talk and sing and sit up and stand on her head if I'm lying next to her. If I leave the room, she'll get up out of bed and turn on the lights."

It sounds like you have several issues here. First, she may or may not be getting enough sleep, right? She's not falling asleep easily, so we don't know if that's because she's so wound up that she can't fall asleep, or because she's had enough sleep if she naps. I doubt she naps at four, but possible. It may be that she just is too wound up and is now able to keep herself awake.

But also, she's taking two hours to fall asleep, which doesn't make sense. Also, you have to stay with her for two hours, which isn't good.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So we first have to figure out if she's getting enough sleep. Does she wake up in the morning by herself in a good mood? That would tell us that she's getting enough sleep, and then that means maybe you're putting her to bed too early at 7:00, And that's why she likes to wait until 9:00. But if you need to wake her in the morning or she's grumpy when she wakes up, she probably does need more sleep, so then it's a question of being too wound up. In that case, if she's wound up on adrenaline and stress hormones, you need to get them out of her system. 20 minutes of laughter and running around -- but do it before dinner time, so that you shift her body chemistry, but without her being wound up from running around towards bedtime.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's possible she has a very active mind, and that's keeping her up. I've seen that. In that case, sometimes music helps, but kids who are musical sometimes hear the music and then they get analytical about the music or they're following the music in great concentration and that keeps them awake, so it depends on who she is. Audio stories are wonderful to help kids fall asleep, but it can't be something exciting like Harry Potter, obviously, or even something much less exciting, still a story often keeps kids awake. I would say what she really needs is a kid's meditation that's specifically designed to help them fall asleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would also try things like massage and EFT. Just go to my website and put in EFT, E as in Eric, F as in fitness and T as

in therapy. EFT is just a technique of tapping on your acupressure points and releasing stress. There's a whole article on how to do that, and it's great when you can't fall asleep or you're anxious about something. Always good for kids with social anxiety before they do something that makes them anxious. Try those things to shift her body chemistry so she can fall asleep more easily.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then finally, she has to choose to settle down. Actually make a deal with her. She can have a later bedtime, but only if she commits to going to sleep instead of playing. Instead of at 7:00, we'll do lights out a half an hour later at 7:30, but she has to promise, make a deal with you, shake on it, write down a contract that you both sign that she's going to actually go to sleep. She will, of course, test this the very first night, and when she starts talking and moving, you say to her, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. We have a contract. We have an agreement. I let you go to bed later because you said that you would go to sleep right away. We shook on this. We signed a contract. Time for lying down. Bed time." You just keep having her lie down over and over again. If she cries, fine. No problem. That's probably what she needs.

You insist on enforcement. You don't let her get out of bed. You don't let her sing. Just say, "No, sweetheart. No. You know what? We're going to go back to the 7:00 bedtime tomorrow if you can't do this."

Really try to help her be successful in this, because she'll probably go to sleep more quickly if she actually does this. Help her settle herself. When you first make the agreement and do the contract, say, "What if it's hard for you to settle down and go to sleep and you feel like getting up or moving around or singing? What will we do to help you settle down? What about this? What about tapping? What about me singing to you?"

By the way, singing to her could get old real fast. Again, listening to an audio is the answer to that. So help her with the tools that she needs to be successful, and I think you'll get out of the trap you're in.

**Question 8:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:04

A parent is asking about night terrors. Despite what your daycare folks told you, they're not uncommon in kids. Most people outgrow them. They occur during stage four deep sleep or the transition from stage four to REM sleep. The person is actually biologically asleep according to their brain waves, even if their eyes are open, so it's different than a nightmare that's during REM sleep. It can happen as a result of stress, and it can happen when they've been sick. It can even happen when they've gotten overheated at night. It's about the arousal system in the brain. I have a whole article on it. Just put "night terrors" into the Aha! Parenting website search box, and there are a lot of suggestions in that article that should help you.

**Question 9:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:16:46

A parent says, "I finally got my three-year-old to sleep in his own bed next to our large mattress, but every night he climbs into the family bed, and then I'm stuck between him and the five-month-old and I can't get any sleep."

I know. I am so sorry. That is a total drag, I would say, first of all, you need to be able to get enough sleep to be a good mom. This is important to solve, and I would do whatever you had to do to make it work, logistically speaking, if you could. When I was in your position, I bought a king-sized bed. Now, you may not be able to do that. Many people I know have solved it with a sidecar for the five-month-old, so that you attach your crib on the other side of the bed. If you have a partner, I know many people who have solved this by having the partner sleep next to the three-year-old. So if the three-year-old can be transitioned to his own bed on a mattress on the floor, and your partner can sleep there with the three-year-old, then

the three-year-old doesn't have to get up in the middle of the night and come after you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, you may not like that idea because you want the three-year-old to learn to sleep by himself. I totally get that, and maybe your partner wants to sleep with you. I would totally get that too. But what you can do is, you could have a double bed mattress in your three-year-old's room. I have seen this work very successfully. Over and over again I've seen this work successfully. Put a double bed mattress in, and gradually your partner can begin to extricate him or herself from the three-year-old, so that you're sleeping more and more apart from the three-year-old. Over time, you can actually begin to leave the bed. It works great if you have two single bed mattresses, that way you don't have to buy a double bed mattress for your child. Use two single bed mattresses, because your baby will eventually need one anyway, whether you get bunk beds or have them in their own rooms or have them both in the same room. They'll both need a single bed, so you just buy the second single bed mattress now.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You put them next to each other. The three-year-old goes to bed in his own bed. Your partner is there with the three-year-old, but gradually tells the three-year-old, "I'm moving onto my own mattress." The three-year-old, more and more is falling asleep on his own mattress without touching your partner. Once a three-year-old can do that, they won't go looking for your partner in the night. That's the key to the whole thing. You want them to fall asleep not touching a parent, so they don't need to come find the parent when they wake up in the night and the parent's not there. That's the crucial thing. I would just say that's usually the best way to effectively change for the three-year-old to not be moving into your bed. I hope one of those ideas works for you because you need some sleep and you deserve it, and your kids deserve you to be a well rested mom.

**Question 10:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:19:28

A parent is saying, "I have a six-year-old daughter and I started the sleeping advice on the Aha! Parenting website, but it actually makes her even less confident to go to sleep."

So I would say, there's a reason for that. Your daughter's anxious. You had a very long answer here or comment, and everything I read there seems like she's very anxious. She's afraid of bad dreams. She's afraid to go to sleep. She's afraid to close her eyes, so this is anxiety. She needs help with it, and the answer is on page 124 to 127 of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. It tells you how to help her through that anxiety. You can do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There are also a lot of specific things, but most of those you've already looked at. You did cranial sacral work, you gave her a back rub, all that stuff. You can do audios that she can listen to and that will help her calm down. I don't see that in your answer, so I think you could try that. But really the reason that all of these things are not helping is because she has so much fear. I would say follow the advice on 124 to 127. It's with a child named Morgan. I think you'll find that's the answer you need.

**Question 11:**

Parent: 00:20:39

I left this question on the Facebook group several weeks ago, but I just want to say thank you very much. We're so grateful for what my husband and I have learned in this course. We have a very spirited six-year-old and a not so spirited three-year-old, and parenting them has been very different. With our six-year-old, we have an incredibly difficult time right before bedtime. I know a lot of parents have that. She's excellent. When she is asleep, she doesn't get out of her bed. We had done some sleep training with her when she was younger. I find when we're going to sleep she goes through the routine fine. She has her bath.

We lay down and read books. We're going to say goodbye, and then it's like the emptying of the backpack. She gets so overly emotional. She starts talking about things that seem unimportant to me, and I know they are obviously important to her, so I'm trying to be very patient during that time and make sure her needs are met.

Parent:

But I find it's every single night still, and she's six and a half now, she either ends up crying, or if she doesn't cry, she's talking to herself for up to an hour in her room alone. She just really has no self regulation at that time. I'm wondering what we can do to help her get that, because I can see with my three-year-old, she's so easy. She lays down, she goes to bed, she twirls her hair. There's no issue, and there's never been an issue with her. I'm just wondering what we can do?

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, I think you're right that this is a lot of feelings coming up, and she has no emotional regulation at that time of day. Now, when you think about it, none of us do, right? The ego control --the prefrontal cortex function, the executive center of the brain -- relaxes. In fact, it goes away. At that time of day, it goes to sleep, basically, and that's when the unconscious comes to the surface. Often, not just kids, but adults who are falling asleep or who wake up in the middle of the night, suddenly they can feel really worried about something that they weren't worried about during the day, because those sort of hidden fears come to the fore without our ... The things that go bump in the night, right? We don't have our executive centers so functional when we're going to sleep or waking up in the middle of the night, so we don't regulate ourselves as well. So how can we help her with that?

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say the first thing is to try to help her with it during the day when it's not bedtime. Get her laughing as much as possible during the day, and that will decrease her fears. I mean, she is a spirited kid, right?

Parent:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Laura Markham: Make sure she gets to laugh. 4:00 should be laughter time. She should absolutely be laughing every day after school as much as possible. Just whatever gets her laughing, just do it every single day without fail afterschool. Then if she seems crabby at all, if she seems like she's had a hard time at all, try to do a scheduled meltdown if she'll still cry with you. Will she still cry with you?

Parent: Yes, she does.

Dr. Laura Markham: Great. So anytime she's the least bit out of sorts, use that as an opportunity to get her crying, because that will help anything that otherwise would come up at bedtime to come out when you can handle it, instead of at bedtime, right? So those are really important ways to sort of keep any daily dosage of stuff she comes home from school with, so she can offload it on a daily basis.

Dr. Laura Markham: Now, the next thing I would say is to give her some tools to use at bedtime to calm herself. You can teach her that everybody's worries come up at that time. What you're going to do when she has worries at bedtime is, you're going to write them down, anything she wants to tell you, and you're going to ask her about them the next day. You could ask her about them on the walk to school, and they probably won't seem like a very big deal. You can even ask her about them at breakfast. But what will happen after a good night's sleep is she's going to say, "Yeah, that's not really a big problem. Yeah, Jamie was mean. He said that to me, but you know what? I'm just going to tell him, I don't even care what he says." You'll find that she has inner strength that comes to the fore the next morning that wasn't there at bedtime.

Dr. Laura Markham: It's a good thing to wait, in a way to talk about these things until the next day, but you can also reassure her. You can say, "Pretend I'm Jamie. What would you say to me?" You can actually give her tools to help her deal with those worries the next day in the light of day as you're having breakfast with her or something. That gives her a way to sort of offload the worries, but in a way that they're going away somewhere safe. You'll say, "I'm going to write them

all down, and I'm going to take this with me out of the room. I'm going to put down on the dining room table, and in the morning when you wake up, it'll be there and I will help you sort out all these worries. You don't have to be concerned. You don't have to worry about them."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another thing that can be really helpful after you've done that is to have her listen to a guided meditation that's on an audio. You don't want her to have to wear headphones at night, because it's not comfortable to sleep in, but to set up so that there's an audio player in her room of some sort that she can hear through a speaker and to just play. There are many, many of these online. There are many free ones.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There's something called "Stress-free Kids" that I recommend often, just because I've heard good results from those. There are some for different age kids, and she'll let you listen to it first to see if you think it'd be a good thing for your child. If it isn't, you can give it back to her and trade it in for a different one. These are designed to help kids relax and fall asleep, and they're very good for kids whose minds are very busy. Because when you have a kid whose mind is busy worrying about the things that happened today or the things that are going to happen tomorrow, then they have a hard time relaxing and letting go and going to sleep. But if we can substitute something else for their mind, it's like throwing a dog a bone. The dog stops barking and just chews the bone.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If we can give the mind something else to do, it's like what meditators do, where they use a mantra. We're giving her something else to listen to. We're going to the octopus's garden under the sea, and we're saying hi to the octopus. We're taking some deep breaths before we go down under the sea, and then whatever. She goes through the guided meditation, and it helps her to calm her body, and before you know it, she's asleep. That kind of thing can actually really help kids fall asleep quickly, without them needing to sort of talk to themselves for an hour to fall asleep. What do you think?

Parent: That sounds fantastic and exactly what I wanted to hear.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay, wonderful.

Parent: Thank you.

### Question 12:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:27:56 "When it's time to stop reading together at night time, there's always a fight. 'Just one more page.'" Her daughter's eight already. So first of all, I would tell you, of course your daughter's job is to ask for one more page. That's the kid's job.

Now, you're hoping it wouldn't be a fight every time. You're hoping she wouldn't fight with you, and I think the answer to that is, if you don't get in and read another page, sooner or later she will stop fighting because she'll get that.

But the other thing is she has a hard time letting go at night. All children do. Bedtime is like being sent to Siberia. If you see it from their point of view, they will do anything to get you to stay with them. Bedtime is awful. And so I would say bedtime will be an issue. And I think the answer is, you help with transitions, of course, and you figure out ways to make it easier. You talk to her before bedtime about what would help her with the transition. You do a lot of preventive maintenance during the day and when it comes time for bedtime you say, "I know you're going to say one more page Sweetie."

Dr. Laura Markham: And by the way, move it earlier. Move bedtime earlier so that you can be more patient. Because if you're at the end of your rope, you won't be patient and your child will get more upset. Because remember, you always have the power either to calm the storm or to escalate it. So here's the thing to keep in mind. Here's the image. There's some dry brush in a field and there's a spark in it. Someone's

dropped a match. It's starting to burn. You're holding two cups. One is water, the other is gasoline. Which one are you going to pour?

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you see it from your child's point of view, you'll pour the water. If you've started early enough that you're not at the end of your rope, you'll pour the water. If you're fed up and frustrated with your child, you're going to pour the gasoline. You never need to pour the gasoline. You want more love and less drama, right?

So your job is to set up the situation. You know this happens every night. It's going to happen every night. Don't hope it'll be different tonight. A, Talk to her about it. B, Set up the transition so that she's more able to deal with it. C, Start earlier. Then in the moment say, "It's going to be time to stop after this page." "No, no, one more page." Now you can always do, "Okay, one more page and then we'll stop." But then that's the way you do it every single night and you never go past that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And she can cry as much as she wants and you can hold her about how hard it is. But if you've done preventive maintenance, you'll find as long as you're clear about the deadline and you don't give in on that limit, and you've done preventive maintenance -- She'll probably test you if she's very strong-willed -- But at some point she'll stop, because it's like a wall. When you press on a wall, it does not move. Even a strong willed child knows eventually, you can't go through the wall no matter what. But the wall doesn't get mad at them. Imagine if the wall hit back, the kid would be in there hitting the wall all day every day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's what we have to remember. For us, we're the wall. Don't hit back. Don't fight back. Hold your position without lashing out at your child. Once they get that you're that solid, that you can be completely empathic, which of course the wall is not, then it really helps. But you're not going to fight back. You're not going to get angry. And at that point your child will end up acquiescing to your limit. They'll be more likely to follow your limit.

**Question 13:**

- Parent: 00:31:31 My question is that I've got a five year old boy and two other children as well, but my five year old really struggles with nightmares and with fear, a lot of fear. He won't go pee by himself and I have to stand at the bottom of the stairs. But particularly nightmares, he wakes up in the night at least once a week and is really frightened. I always go to his bed and comfort him, but when he's telling me about his dream, I just wonder if there's any advice you could give me? Anything I could say in the moment that can help him to realize he's maybe in control of it or it's just a story, that could help him not be so scared.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Well, I would ask first. How is he the rest of the time?
- Parent: Fine. Yeah. I mean we're doing lots of connection and he's much more nervy than his brother.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So his nightmares are not disabling him. That was the reason I was asking those questions.
- Parent: No. Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. And the second question is, is it the same nightmare over and over or is it a different nightmare, different nights?
- Parent: No, it was always different things. And he doesn't watch television and we are quite careful about what we read with him. So it's not that he dreams about monsters, but he doesn't want to die and things like that.
- Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So I think he's probably a pretty sensitive kid. I want to tell you that the research in the US is that about 10 percent of kids have a nightmare once a week. Like five, six, seven, eight year olds. So that's pretty common apparently. When I say 10 percent, it's not unusual. It's true that it's not all kids having a nightmare once a week,

but it's not unusual. And I think as long as there's no stressor in his life, like he's not getting yelled at by a teacher or a parent, and he seems to be doing fine in other areas of his life, then I'm not worried that there's something wrong in his life. He's probably a very highly sensitive kid who's working things out in his dreams.

So the first thing is to always listen to what his nightmares are, if he'll talk about them, and then to try to find a way that he can overcome it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So when he says, "And then the dog was chasing me and I was running to get away from the dog and I woke up before the dog could bite me." Like let's say he has a dream like that, you can say, "That's great. You woke up, it's great. You knew just what to do to stop the dog from biting you. I bet even in the dream there were things you could do. What could you have done in the dream?" And he'll say nothing because in the dream you don't know you can get help, right? In the dream you're just terrified. And you can say, "Well, could you have called for help or could you suddenly have begun to fly? Or could you have turned around and said to the dog, "Stop, let's be friends." And you know you can give him different ideas and you can help him rewrite what could have happened in his dream.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's very empowering for him. "Maybe next is that when the dog barks at you, you can bark right back at him and tame the dog and then you have a dog who's your friend and he's big and he keeps all other dogs away from you."

My son was scared of dragons when he was little and he wouldn't go pee by himself. He had to have me there because there were dragons if he went to the bathroom. I didn't have a bathroom on the floor with the kitchen and the living room. He had to go upstairs to the bathroom, and he was scared to go by himself when he was older than five, I think six or seven. Yeah, because he was in first or second grade then. And I said to him, "But what if you made friends with the dragons?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

And at first he wasn't having any of it, but after a while we got him a toy dragon and he was able to use that dragon as his defender against all the other dragons.

But you can even do it just depending on his dream. You can do it in his imagination, that he could imagine making friends with it.

So it won't always work. But sometimes he'll find that this is empowering, if you give him a way to rewrite the script.

And then the other way to do it, to help him work it out is, the next day, ask him to draw the dream. Ask him to draw the story of the dream and to come up with a different ending, a better ending. And as he does that, he's reprogramming his subconscious so that it's coming up with a better way to resolve whatever this fear is that he's coping with.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You always want to get him away, to triumph over whatever the thing is that's scaring him. And you can even give him words, like in the middle of the night, if he says the dog was scaring him, you can say, "What could you say to the dog? 'Go away, Dream dog! It's my bedroom and you're not allowed,'" or whatever. Even once he's awakened, he can sort of say that aloud into the night holding your hand, you know? And as he begins to feel empowered about the fear, I think you'll probably see fewer nightmares.

Parent:

Right. Thank you so much. That's really very helpful.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You're very welcome. I'm glad.

#### Question 14:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:36:18

"How do we get our four year old to go to bed and stay in bed? She won't go to sleep for hours after we tuck her in." So that doesn't sound like the only problem is that she's

getting out of bed. The problem is she can't fall asleep. There's another question. "How do I get our five year old asleep by himself? He's quite anxious." That's sort of the same question. "He needs us to sleep with him." And then there's a third one. "My seven year old can't fall asleep by herself. We've tried everything but her body is just very restless." Okay, so these three are sort of the same question and I'm going to say that I'm seeing in each of these kids, anxiety. Even the four year old who can't fall asleep for hours has a new home that she moved into two months ago. So that's harder.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would say go to *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*. Turn to the EQ Coaching With a Difficult Child section, which is on page 124. Read the whole section there about Morgan, the child who couldn't go to sleep, and about how the parents worked with her. Because that's your answer.

So first of all, all the preventative maintenance we've been talking about comes first before your child can sleep. Secondly, you want to get them laughing and you want to get them laughing every day and you want to get them laughing about physical activity that's scary to them, where you can help them dance on the edge of their fears. Because anxiety is just another word for fear. And these are kids who are having anxiety. So the way to help them work through the fear is the laughter. And specifically, a four year old, you put them on your back and you're the bucking Bronco.

Dr. Laura Markham:

A seven year old, it might be a little harder depending how big she is, but anything to get the child laughing because when they're on your back as a bucking Bronco, they're going "Ah, ah, is Daddy going to drop me?" Right? On some level... They're laughing like crazy, but they're worried that they might get dropped. They're not shrieking in fear or you've gone too far. They're shrieking in laughter. But that laughter is working out the anxiety. So that's very important to do on a daily basis and it helps them sleep better.

And then there are a lot of other suggestions that are on the AHA Parenting website. If you put into the search box, fall asleep, afraid of the dark, anxiety, bedtimes, there are step-by-step suggestions that talk about helping kids with meditation, with something to listen to, there are recommendations of things for them to listen to, to help them relax.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And the thing about Morgan in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*, it talks about how you can help your child to work out fear.

So one of the questions says that the child had operations when he was a baby, at four weeks old. And he's always been anxious about sleeping. You know that could easily be related. That might even take an EMDR session, only go to somebody who's had experience with children. But since your child had operations and it was when he was only four weeks old, so he doesn't know when it happened, he doesn't have any conscious memories probably. I would consider EMDR for him.

But I would also say you don't have to go back into the past ever for yourself or your child. You can help your child work on whatever's coming up just by working on what's coming up -- and the way you do that is described in the Morgan anecdote in *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*.

### Question 15:

Parent:

00:39:31

“What would you do with a seven year old who resists bedtime and extends it as long as she can by getting out of bed after she's been put down to bed? After you've done all the reading and bedtime rituals and it's time to go to sleep, then she starts resisting going to sleep.”

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, so if you've done an entire bedtime routine and your child is still resisting, then either she's scared and anxious, or it's entirely possible she's just testing the limit because

frankly, who wants to go to bed? FOMO and all that. She's missing a lot of fun things. So first of all, have you talked to her about it?

Parent: We have. She will come up with reasons that she can't go to bed and often she'll start engaging in battles saying, "You made me so mad today."

Parent: And it becomes a battle where she's teeing up a problem then for us to resolve and, but her view of resolving it is two hours of going back and forth. So there's some repair and resolution and we emphasize to her about how it's really important for her to be rested in the morning. And she knows it's difficult to wake up in the morning because she does also have difficulty waking up in the morning. She doesn't say that there's something scary to her. There's always something new as a reason for not going to bed.

Dr. Laura Markham: So it's valid to say, "I'm still having a hard time about X, Y, Z that happened." But you don't have to resolve it then. You said she has a hard time getting up in the morning. She's not getting enough sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham: And I think, in fact what I would say to her is, "You know Sweetheart, until you can wake up in the morning and wake up happily on your own without us waking you up, you're not getting enough sleep. That's what the research shows. So we need to start going to bed earlier, not later, but earlier." So I would work in ways earlier in the evening -- What time do you want her to go to sleep so that she'll get enough sleep?

Parent: Oh, we would like her to sleep by 8:30, latest. We start the wind-down around eight and read with her and her brother, reading in her room. I mean, we've tried different ways, both reading in her room, reading in our bedroom, tried different ways to make the wind-down transition better. She will get all calm and wound down and the reading's complete. But then, she bubbles up.

Dr. Laura Markham: So I would say that half an hour is not enough time to wind down, for most kids. It's got to be at least an hour. If you

want her to sleep at 8:30, you have to turn lights out at 8:00. That means start the wind down at 7:15. I mean seriously, that is what I would probably say off the top of my head. And I would say you need to do laughter with her before that, probably before dinner or before bath or whatever, because that helps kids to wind down, doing the laughter -- before -- helps to lower the anxiety. And I would build in a little thing in your routine. "You know what Sweetheart, we're not going to be able to work things out after lights out. So, work out anything you're upset about from your day. So this is our time to work out anything you're still upset about your day."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And give her that opportunity as part of the bedtime routine, before you read the story even. So that she's not getting all riled up beforehand. And then I do think it's partly a matter of setting a limit. I think it's just a matter of you being completely patient and boring and returning her to bed over and over again. So if you're turning off the light at eight o'clock, which is probably what I would recommend for a kid that age -- I would give her something to focus on. Do you give her any kind of music or a story? And when I say story, I don't mean Harry Potter. I mean like a bedtime audio that helps kids fall asleep. One that's designed for that.

Parent:

We've offered it and she's rejected wanting to do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Uh-huh (affirmative). So when you turn out her light, what happens?

Parent:

She'll come out of the room.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Okay. And brother is older or younger?

Parent:

Younger.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And he doesn't come out of the room?

Parent:

No. There are times that it gets so worked up that he'll start coming out and complaining that he can't sleep

either. Or if she's really worked up, it's not every day. But she'll bring him into the act.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There are many ways to play with this. You're not alone in this. Many people have this issue. It's how do you hold the limit firmly and not punish, right? That's really what it is, not threaten. And that's what you feel like doing at some point. Right?

So one thing that is actually very effective that I have seen work with a lot of kids is to give them a get out of jail free card, even call it that. But it's like, "We're going to give you something that you can use and you get two of them and if you save it, you can have them for tomorrow." I would not give more than two. "You can use one tonight to get out of bed and you could use one tomorrow. Or you can save them both for next week in case you need to get out of bed next week.

Dr. Laura Markham:

These are very valuable and you only get two of them. So anything you need now, like a drink of water, tell me." Every child in the world needs water by their bedside, in a sippy cup kind of thing or with a straw. So whatever she might get up for. What does she say she's getting up for?

Parent:

She says that she can't sleep or she's not tired. Sometimes if there's too much light, even though we've dimmed the lights, sometimes she's said it's too dark, ironically. And she's insisted on leaving the door open a little bit, which we're okay with because we turn off the hall light. So she wants a nightlight. But it's just something bothering her and it changes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, so those are interesting things. I mean it sounds like she could also be a highly sensitive person, like I've seen kids like this who can't fall asleep because every noise bothers them and they need a white noise machine.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Every light bothers them and they need blackout curtains, you know? But then they're scared of the dark, so they need the light, the nightlight in the hall, not in their own room but in the hall, that kind of thing. And for those kids

it really does help to have a white noise machine or some sort of a sound going on for them. So I guess I would just say she does need some brainstorming with you to fall asleep. But also if she's not doing daily laughter, I would do that because kids who can't fall asleep, often they're tossing and turning. It's anxiety. I would do some tapping with her. Do you know what tapping is? EFT?

Parent: I remember it from your course, from week two or week one.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. So it's on the website. You can put tapping into the search box on the Aha! Parenting website. Try that with her and get her to try it herself. Often it makes people begin yawning when they tap or when you tap on her because it releases, right?

So I think all of these things will help her wind down. But I would also simply return her to bed when she comes out. "Oh Sweetie, I'm so sorry you're having a hard time falling asleep. Here's a big hug. Let's take you back in your room. What could you think about to fall asleep?"

I mean, have you taught her any relaxation techniques? "Let's imagine your feet are getting heavy. Let's imagine your calf is getting heavy. Your knee is getting heavier, your thigh is getting heavy," but I'm going much faster than one would go. You'd have to teach her this, not at that moment, but in advance and do it with her a few times or even make a tape of you doing it.

Dr. Laura Markham: That's a good way to get her into audios that would help her to relax and then she can begin to do it for herself. You can say, "Okay, well you can do this for yourself. I know, Sweetie, it's hard to fall asleep, but it's time. It's time for bed." And I would start the bedtime process earlier. I know it seems counterintuitive because she can't fall asleep, but I'm wondering if she's actually past the point of tiredness at 8:30. Many seven years olds are.

Parent: She is.

Dr. Laura Markham: Yes. So you know what happens is, the body shoots itself full of adrenaline to keep you going when you're seven and it's past your bedtime, or past when you should be asleep. I wouldn't be surprised if she's really tired and needed to have lights out at 7:30 so I would definitely move that time a little earlier.

Parent: Thanks.

### Question 16:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:48:17 A parent says, "My 12 year old daughter refuses to get up in the morning." So first I want to say you're doing great in the morning, with helping her wake up slowly, rubbing her back and stuff, putting on music for her. But I want to make sure you're starting the night before. You say you put her to bed at a decent time, but she's awake at 10:00 PM singing to herself. So she is not getting enough sleep and she's not waking up by herself.

So just like I said to the last question, she needs to be asleep early enough that she wakes up in the morning without an alarm. So that might mean a much earlier bedtime. But you need to help her fall asleep, which means no screens in the evening at all, and she probably needs more physical activity outside. She probably needs more laughter, which changes the body chemistry to make her less stressed and easier to fall asleep. And connecting with her probably will help her fall asleep easily.

Dr. Laura Markham: And then finally I would look for meditations that are designed to help her fall asleep at night. One source of those meditations is "Stress Free Kids" online, they have them for that age child that are sleep oriented and they're great.

**Question 17:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:49:22

A parent is struggling with bedtime for a three year old. She tried moving special time to right before bedtime and that helps a little, but still she will run down the hall screaming -- the child, not the adult. Or sometimes she'll hit mom or slither on the floor. Well, I'm glad to hear that moving special time to right before bedtime helped a little. That tells me some of it might have been separation and that when she feels more connected with you, she cooperates. So I would do more laughter before special time, or maybe during special time. But really more laughter earlier in the evening, which bonds you, and makes her more likely to cooperate, and reduces her stress hormones.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I think it's really important, but don't do it at the last minute because that will wind her up. I would also play bedtime with her during the day. Pretend she's putting you to bed and you hate it. Get her laughing and insisting that it's time for bed. Make sure you do regular roughhousing where you toss her around. And look for every opportunity to strengthen your relationship, because the behaviors you're describing are a kid who's not following your lead. And also, do you have a baby, you have a seven month old? That could be what's going on. That she's not following your lead, because she's acting out here. So anything you could do, special time and roughhousing would probably really help. I want to add that clearly your daughter hates bedtime. Most kids do. It feels like being sent to Siberia, but your daughter is sort of extreme in her opposition.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Most kids at least go along with their jammies to get to the story. So maybe there's something you can do to make it a little more enticing, like play an audio for her before you leave, like when you're leaving the room or she picks certain music or a guided meditation that is designed to put kids to sleep, something. If you try all that and this continues, I would do a lot more problem solving about it. Is the upset because she tosses and turns and can't sleep? The cure for that is more roughhousing earlier in the day.

Is it because she's afraid of the dark? Then nightlights. Is it because you take your seven month old with you and leave Miss Three alone in her dark room? There is not really a good solution to that. But if you have a partner, try to send the baby off with the partner during bedtime with Miss Three.

### Question 18:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:51:34

Our next question is from a parent who says that her five-year-old always requests tickling at night and they tickle him until he's satisfied and then they caress his back and he falls asleep easily after that. And she's worried because I advise not to tickle and so she's worried that maybe it's not a good idea. The reason I advise against tickling is that often kids laugh so hard they can't speak to get you to stop. Also, scientists are not sure that the laughter from tickling offers the same release as the laughter from a joke does. We think that roughhousing is more like the joke, more psychological. And the tickling is more like a neurological reaction, like a knee jerk thing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But the truth is we don't really know and if your son really wants you to tickle him, there is no harm in it. I will say that I've heard from parents that once the child knows that there are other ways to laugh with the parent, they often stop requesting tickling. You might try pretending to tickle like, "I'm going to get you." Coming closer and closer with your hand. And he'll probably laugh just as much. But if he insists on tickling to get out his tension and falls asleep easily, I would not insist that you stop. I think he knows what he needs more than I do.

### Question 19:

Parent: 00:52:44

Thank you first of all for everything. So I've been doing all the Peaceful Parenting approaches and working on my triggers and doing stop, drop, and breathe and all the stuff. I see that the only problem that I still have is during

bedtime routines. It's the only time that I actually use threats.

Our routine stretches for an hour from the time that we get to the bed, not the stuff that we do before it. And in that hour we read and we listen to songs, and we listen to a recorded story. That's the last thing that we do after an hour actually of reading the books. And he always wants to stretch it in one more and that's when I start threatening with, "Okay, if you don't stop with the requests now I'm going to leave the room." And yeah, I don't really want to do that, but I don't know what to do differently.

Dr. Laura Markham: Sure. So first of all, why do you listen to a story last thing, the recorded story? Naturally it's going to be hard to stop that, if it's a continuing story.

Parent: No, it's he wants to stretch the part before we go to the recorded story.

Dr. Laura Markham: Ah, well so it is part of his job description to stretch it. I mean that is his job. Because to you, bedtime is like the final thing you have to do to be a great mom and get your kid happily off to sleep and then you can have a little downtime. But to him he's being sent off to Siberia. Right? So naturally it's his job to push it. And it's your job to just have a sense of humor and hold the line. Right? Because that will happen to every child with that time. Most every child, every time. I would make sure that your routine is relaxing at the very end.

Dr. Laura Markham: Like I would, if you want to listen to something at the end, I would listen to one of those relaxation audios I mentioned that Lori Light makes, "Stress Free Kids", something like that. Or there are many of them on Google, if you just go to Amazon or whatever and Google them. I think those are effective. But I think a story that keeps him wound up is probably not effective. And when you say he stretches out the stuff in between, does that mean he's not cooperating? What does that mean?

Parent: It means that the stuff in between is reading stories, reading poems and reading stories. For instance, we would read a story and he would stop me after every sentence and ask questions. Which is okay, but not after every sentence.

Dr. Laura Markham: But wait a minute. Maybe he's hungry for connection with you and maybe that's what's important to him. And you should do fewer things. Maybe you can just say, "You really love to ask me questions and I love to answer them, but it will mean we can't do the recorded story tonight." That's not a threat. That's what it means if we're going to choose to spend the time here. "Do you want me to answer that or do you want to do the recorded story tonight? Which one?"

Parent: Great. Thanks.

Dr. Laura Markham: Okay. Good luck.

Parent: I think I was in a cycle of doing this that I just couldn't step out of it.

Dr. Laura Markham: I think you're right. I think we get in a cycle and we feel we get into the power struggle. And it doesn't need to be a power struggle. I mean, you could see it as a positive thing. That he wants you to answer his questions because he's so excited about whatever it is.

Parent: Thanks.

### Question 20:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:56:22 Here's more questions about sleep. Here's a two and a half year old, and it says, "How do we get him to go to sleep in a gentle parenting way? It takes us two and a half hours of patting and stuff, and we're completely exhausted. And we're terrified because we have another child on the way. He does take a one hour nap during the day, and, but if he

doesn't, it doesn't change whether he settles in the evening. Most people out there seem to be advising controlled crying, which doesn't seem like what you would advise."

That's right; that's not what I would advise. What I would say is, something's keeping him from settling down for two to three hours. Wow. So we don't know what that is, but I bet he's over tired. Are you doing an hour of laughter a day? Roughhousing with laughter at least a half an hour? Because most of the time when you do that, the child settles much more quickly. Most of the time that's what it is that is keeping the child from settling so quickly.

### Question 21:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:57:17

A parent says "My 22 month old wakes for hours at night and then still wakes up at six in the morning. He struggles to fall asleep and stay asleep."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, that's hard. It's a challenge to have a hard time falling asleep. It's a challenge to get up at 6:00 AM, but it's even more of a challenge that he wakes up at night and stays awake for hours. You know, usually by now, by 22 months, the body clock is set so kids know that they can't stay up at night. But not for all kids, and the kids who get up at night when they're toddlers, usually it's because one of these common problems.

Dr. Laura Markham:

One is sleep associations. You fix that by helping your kid learn to fall asleep on their own. There's a lot on the toddler sleep section of the Aha! Parenting website about that.

Another thing is environment: light, noise. You want to use a white noise generator. You want blackout curtains. Temperature, you know, make sure you've worked with that; hopefully you've got that all sorted.

Hunger: he should not be eating or nursing when he wakes up at night, no matter what. If you stop eating and nursing

at night, he will eat enough during the day to compensate. Night weaning is covered on the Aha! Parenting website. Definitely you have to wean him, just nightly now. No 22-month-old needs to nurse at night, because they can eat their food during the day and it makes you a worse mom to get up with him, as you're saying. And he's not the kind of kid who falls back asleep easily, it sounds like.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And also teething or stuffy nose from dust allergies or some other medical issue. Even low iron has been linked to insomnia for some kids. So I would ask your pediatrician to check his iron levels. If he's indeed teething, ask your pediatrician, acetaminophen before bed maybe.

Dust allergies; I would make sure that there's no dust mite issue in terms of the bedding you're using.

And of course, he shouldn't be getting out of bed. Fun is another reason kids wake up. Another is separation anxiety, which can be very high around this age. It can help if he sleeps with you. You might experiment with him sleeping in the same room as you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Another thing is over-tiredness. He's got to be napping. I assume he's napping. If not, he's not getting enough sleep. Even if he is napping, he may not be getting enough sleep because stress hormones build up in the body and make it harder for kids to stay asleep. But there's also the opposite of that, which is that sometimes we expect kids to need more sleep than they do. If he's in a good mood all day, then he is getting enough sleep and he doesn't need more sleep, and it might be that he's ready to go to bed a little later, even though I know that sort of messes up your bedtime routine where he goes to bed earlier and you have time for the older one after that. So, play with those ideas and see what you can do.

### Question 22:

Dr. Laura Markham: 00:59:55

A parent has a question about an all night nurser who she's doing night weaning with and who is exhausted, and

because he's so tired, he's now lashing out and being physically aggressive.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, once you get through the night weaning and he gets sleep again, he's not going to be exhibiting this kind of aggression, so don't worry about that.

Also, I don't know how you started the night weaning, but I want to make sure that he doesn't get nursed to sleep at night, right? One of the reasons kids wake up at night is they're looking for the person who was nursing them to sleep at the beginning of the evening. So I would always recommend if you're night weaning a child that you start by not nursing them to sleep. Otherwise, he will wake up looking to nurse. And also remember his whole life, he's used nursing to fall asleep, so he needs to develop that tool. You don't want to ask him to develop it in the middle of the night when he's exhausted and all of a sudden you're making him learn to fall asleep without nursing, right? Maybe you've already done this, I don't know, but this is a good tip for anyone who's doing night weaning of their child.

Dr. Laura Markham:

After he's reliably falling asleep, you can still nurse him at night. It's fine. But then after he's falling asleep without nursing, even if he wakes up and nurses, he falls asleep without nursing, and then after that's reliable, then you stop nursing at night. And I would just stop at all, at night. How does he know the difference between when he wakes up at one in the morning versus three in the morning? He doesn't.

So a two and a half year old can eat enough during the day that he does not need to nurse at night, and so he doesn't need to nurse at night. You just say, "We nurse when the sun comes up," and there's a book called *Nursies When the Sun Shines* or something There are books you can read to them about this.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And of course, expect a lot of backpack emptying during the day, because nursing is probably one way he's used to managing his emotions. And also expect that he's going to

be very worried about your connection. So make it your top priority during the day to connect with him. But soon you'll have him night weaned. And I'm not suggesting you wean him... all of his weaning during the day, even daytime weaning, all at once. Just start with the night weaning. And there's also an article on my website on gentle weaning. So, take a look at that and I think it'll have a lot of tips for you.

### Question 23:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:02:15

This is from a parent who says, "I usually put our daughter to sleep with a bottle, and the breast if she wants. If I'm not at home, my husband manages without much complaint from her, but if I'm around, she cries and desperately asks for me. Eventually she will accept the bottle from him and fall asleep, but this process is so discouraging, we only tried it a few times. We're expecting a second baby and want to find a solution for my husband to put her to sleep. What's our best approach?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

So of course, your daughter wants you to put her to sleep. She wants the breast if she can have it, and it sounds like she'll take the bottle sometimes, but she is only 23 months old. And always there's a hierarchy of attachment and you're first in line, and she feels safest with you, most secure; so of course, she will fight to get you to put her to sleep. That's totally understandable that you are her preference.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I think you're right that she needs to get used to Dad putting her to bed, and that has to happen before the new baby comes. Good thinking on your part. And it will mean, like so many other limits, that you hold your limit; kindly, empathically trying to make it easy on her, but you still hold your limit. So, I think that means Dad takes over bedtime. I would act this out with her using stuffed animals, showing her what's going to happen... that even though the baby cries and Mommy's sad, Mommy has to

leave at bedtime. You don't have to say what Mommy's doing. Mommy has to go out and Daddy will put the baby to bed. And then have it happen, in her life.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And I would do it for a while until she's completely used to Dad doing it, and I think you'll get to a point where you don't have to leave eventually, after a week or so, where she will accept that Daddy's the one who puts her to bed. To help her accept this more quickly, Dad has to be super empathic. "I know. It's so hard when Mommy's not here. You wish she was here to put you to bed. Me too. I miss her when she's gone too. Don't worry. I'm your parent too. I'm your dad, and I am right here for you and I will take good care of you, and you are safe with me, and I will help you fall asleep."

And of course, before you leave the house, you kiss her goodbye. Gradually, you kiss her goodbye with your coat on, but you haven't left the house yet. Daddy is simultaneously taking her into the other room. So gradually, you won't even need to leave the house. But I do recommend at least two or three weeks of you going to a coffee shop or the library, or sitting in your car, enjoying yourself, your time alone, while Dad puts her to bed, initially. And after a while, she'll be so used to it, she won't really notice that you haven't left the house. If she does, there will be some fireworks. That is true. Don't worry about it. She's in good hands with her dad. She objects to it, for understandable reasons. This isn't her preference, but she's in good hands. And of course, make sure that you're having lots of opportunities to connect with her other than bedtime.

#### Question 24:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:05:31

Our next question is from a parent who says, "We've been following the steps in your instructions on helping toddlers sleep, but we've been stuck at just rocking for months. Every night he cries for a few minutes before he can settle

to sleep. I've tried to make sure we play and giggle to let out stress before we start bedtime. What can we do to help him release and be able to go to sleep himself? He is a 22-month-old child.”

Dr. Laura Markham:

So how great that you make sure to play and giggle to let out stress. Laughter is almost as good as tears are to release stress, but laughter is not as deep as tears. So even though he laughs, which is wonderful, every day he may need to cry also; that just may be what he needs to do. So there's nothing wrong with him crying before bed, and he can cry with you holding him; not a problem. But that doesn't mean you rock him. When he starts to cry, you hold him, and if he won't cry with you holding him, you put him down in his crib or wherever he's sleeping, and he begins to cry, and you have your hands on him and you talk to him gently, and he cries and he's done and he goes to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

There is nothing wrong with that. You're not walking away and leaving him to cry. He does need to release with those tears, and that's not going to last forever. He's going to get older and be more able to handle stress, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with him crying with your hands on him, with one hand on him, even, and relaxing into sleep that way. So this is definitely a step beyond rocking.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you're worried that you're still in the room while he's crying, that's perfectly okay. Over time, when you put him down, he won't cry, and you'll be able to put him down and do whatever your little ritual is, of patting his back a couple of times, and singing a little song, and you'll be able to leave the room. But right now, he still has to cry. That's just fine. And over time, you will be able to put him down, do the patting, sing songs, and leave the room and he won't even be crying.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But for now it's not a problem. Right? He's not going to cry for more than a couple of minutes. And he feels safe and secure in your love, and he's showing you the stresses from his day. It's completely good.

**Question 25:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:07:56

Our next question is about sleep and weaning. A parent asks, "I'm desperate to wean my daughter. I breastfeed her to sleep. Bedtime is a nightmare. She struggles to sleep. I've tried to wean before, but I could not stand all the crying. Within five minutes, I would give her the breast again. She can fall asleep on her own, but only in the car. She's three and a half."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if you're desperate to wean your daughter, you can wean your daughter. Start by reading the article on the Aha! Parenting website on gentle weaning. It walks you through the steps of weaning.

But the real work here is not with your daughter; it's inside your own mind. There is no reason a three and a half year old needs to nurse. My daughter was almost that old when she stopped nursing, so there's nothing wrong with nursing a child that long, but it does mean they have a lot of consciousness about it, a lot of awareness, and their entire life, they've used nursing to go to sleep, and that means they don't have another way to go to sleep. So, you have to help them develop a different way to go to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, absolutely start now. You said you're desperate to wean. That's different than night weaning, okay? But I would start with the night weaning since that's what bothers you. And every night when she struggles to go to sleep, help her go to sleep. And you can start by giving her a different sleep association if it's easier for her. For instance, rocking; you'll have to break rocking eventually, also, as a sleep association. But if she can't fall asleep... you said she struggles to sleep... if she can't fall asleep otherwise, then there's no reason you can't rock her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But no nursing at bedtime. You can introduce this idea by reading some books about it. There are some great books listed on the Aha! website on the gentle weaning article, that talks about the nursies are asleep at night, or the milkies are asleep at night, whatever you call them. And

you should definitely get her some books and start reading with her, and then set a special day that she chooses. Do you want to stop nursing to sleep on Friday or on Saturday? And I do suggest a weekend, because usually you'll have a less pressured schedule the next day. Ask her what she wants to do to fall asleep instead of nursing. Does she want to lie there and listen to music, or does she want you to rock her? Give her a choice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Make sure that earlier in the day you do a lot of roughhousing. In fact, I would do it all week leading up to your doing this. That night at dinner, have a special ceremony where you light a candle and you say thank you for all the wonderful times that she's nursed to sleep, and now it's time for the milkies to sleep at night, and she won't be nursing to sleep any longer. You can act this out with stuffed animals. That's often a very effective way, but for a three and a half year old, you may not need to. She's so aware of it, right?

Dr. Laura Markham:

In fact, my daughter, who's now 23... somehow it came up at dinner the other night because someone with a baby was visiting us, and she said, "Oh, I remember when I was three and Mom told me I wasn't going to nurse anymore." I was weaning her totally at this point, so she had already given up night nursing. And at dinner, she told the assembled guests that she remembered my telling her that she wasn't going to be nursing anymore, and she was outraged at it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So it's a perfectly predictable thing when you take away such a treasured experience that the child relies on heavily, that they're going to cry. And you can do a little ceremony that night, and you can still expect, even if she's happy about it, even if she gets a cupcake or something as part of the ceremony... you can still expect fireworks that evening and that it will be very hard for her to fall asleep, even if you're rocking her. But guess what? That's part of growing up. We adapt, we adjust, we grow, we do hard things with support. So you're supporting her to learn to fall asleep without nursing, right? And that's what you do, and she cries as much as she needs to, and you rock her,

and you absolutely enforce that she's not going to nurse to go to sleep anymore. It's that simple.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You said that you couldn't stand the crying before, so I would just say do some work on that first. Find someone to talk to, a parenting coach or another parent or partner. Find someone who won't try to fix you, who will just accept your feelings, and talk about how you feel when she cries. Maybe it makes you feel like a bad mom. Maybe it awakens all your own childhood longing or panic or fear or grief. Whatever it is, those are your feelings, not hers. She's been well taken care of, and she's perfectly capable of stopping the nursing at night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And of course, once you do that, that's the hardest, and you'll be able to stop nursing first thing in the morning or whatever your other time you do it is, and then throughout the day. And do read the article, because it will give you a lot of tips on helping your child handle the loss of something that's been very important to them.

### Question 26:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:13:21

Our next question is from a parent who is also night weaning. "When we tried night weaning, my almost three year old cried all night, and then nursed at dawn to fall asleep. Our doctor said nursing longer will make her an addict and I disagree."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I disagree also. As you just heard, my daughter nursed until she was three and so did my son, and neither of them has an addictive personality and they're both healthy, well-adjusted young adults. So, I disagree with your doctor. In fact, children all over the world nurse routinely until they're three.

Dr. Laura Markham:

However, you're pregnant again and if you want to night wean, then night wean. Some people are able to nurse throughout a pregnancy. I personally chose not to. I did

not want to tandem nurse, even though some people swear by it. And you can find out more about that in my sibling book, about tandem nursing and that choice.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you're saying that you would like to night wean, so it's time to night wean. And it's great that your daughter likes to read books about weaning. That's great. And guess what? It's still okay to set that limit. It's still okay to enforce it. And you've just heard from me in answer to the previous question how to do that. And if you want some coaching to get support to do it, no shame. Of course. Nursing our children has a lot of emotional resonance, and when we move on from that, there is always grief. We don't want there to be guilt, and there doesn't need to be guilt, but you might need some help with that since your daughter so fiercely wants to keep nursing. So get yourself some coaching support if you'd like. But it is completely fine to wean your daughter and you've heard how to do it.

### Question 27:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:15:11

A parent says, "My two-year-old is comforted by my presence at night, but he's also stimulated. He often won't calm down for my husband, but when I go to soothe him, he calms, but then he struggles to go back to sleep when I'm near. He won't sleep if I leave the room. If I bring him to my bed, he climbs all over me while sleeping. We used to co-sleep, but he became more active at night so we stopped. We make sure he gets plenty of physical activity and connection during the day."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You know, I have heard stories like this before, and often in those situations, the child really missed the mom who was working during the day away from the child. And so when Mom was around at night, the child really wanted to be with her. So obviously, this doesn't happen to all toddlers whose mothers work away from them during the day, but it does happen to some. If that's what's going on

here, then I would really step up your connection time with him when you are able to be with him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But you also say you do plenty of physical activity and connection time during the day. So it does sound to me like maybe that's not the issue. Maybe you are there with him and he gets plenty of connection, and in that case it sounds to me like he just really is a very active little guy who wants to engage. If he's with you, he'll climb all over you, and if he's not with you, he's upset. And he can't even fall back asleep when you're there because he wants to engage with you.

Of course, he does need to sleep at night, and if he's getting plenty of time with you during the day, then you can freely insist on him going to sleep. You say he won't sleep if you leave the room? I think he will fall back asleep, and I think you have to start by putting him to bed at night without you there.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I don't mean you just put him down and walk out. Again, follow the instructions on the Aha! Parenting website, how to get your child to sleep. It's in the toddler section. And help him learn to fall asleep. Still go to him. In the interim, go to him at night when he wakes up, as you're doing now. But teach him to fall asleep without you there. I think you'll find that then, in the middle of the night, A: He's less likely to wake up. And when he does wake up, he'll be more able to fall back asleep without you touching him or being close to him, right? And gradually, he'll be falling asleep at night with you not in the room. And so, when you go in there and comfort him, if he wakes up at night, you'll still be able to leave the room and he'll be able to go back to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I would try those instructions. It will involve some crying. It really does work, because it helps kids work out their fears while you're there with them. So, it takes a lot longer than the kind of sleep training where you walk out of the room and let your child cry. But I also think it doesn't traumatize kids, because you're there to help them work through their fears. And that's what's keeping

them awake, is that they're worried about whether you're there with them; they're afraid. So as you help them with those fears, they're more able to sleep.

### Question 28:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:018:34

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My two-year-old has never been a good sleeper. She's almost impossible to get down for a nap. We have a bedtime routine. Once in bed, she jumps around, plays with her stuffed animals, kicks me, asks to nurse and talk, and it takes a good hour to fall asleep. And then she wakes up between 6 and 10 times a night."

Dr. Laura Markham:

So first, when she wakes up at night, how does she go back to sleep? If she's nursing, that's why she's waking up 6 or 10 times a night. She doesn't know how to go back to sleep without your help. So, the first thing to do is to stop night nursing. She's two. She doesn't need the calories at night. There's no reason that you need to be waking up 6 or 10 times a night to nurse her. So, there are detailed instructions on my website about how to teach your child to fall asleep and sleep all night. It does involve crying because any sensible child will object to night weaning, and to having to sleep in their own bed, and to having to fall asleep without nursing, if that's what she's used to doing. But it does not involve leaving your child to cry without you, and she is old enough to do this. So I'm not pushing you to have her sleep in her own bed necessarily, but I do think she should not be nursing to sleep, and she should not be nursed back to sleep when she wakes at night, and that will help her learn to fall asleep without nursing, which is what it sounds like she needs to do.

### Question 29:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:19:52

The next question is from a parent who says, "Our two and a half year old daughter was never a cuddling kid and didn't like co-sleeping, so she sleeps in her own room, which was fine until the baby was born six months ago,

and now the older one feels left out. I tried to bring her in with us, but she just jumps around and can't fall asleep, although she really needs to sleep.”

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, your oldest is still only two, so naturally she feels left out. It's hard for a two-year-old to understand why this other baby's always on your lap and in your bed. I think your easiest solution might be to have your oldest in a toddler bed, or a mattress on the floor in her own room, and then you can snuggle in her bed with her to put her to sleep. And the baby can be there, too; maybe you can feed her at that point. That maintains your oldest daughter in her own room, but gives her the coziness of you snuggling up with her and baby, too. Of course, after she's asleep, you relocate with the baby to your own bed.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, the drawback to this solution is, it's possible that your oldest will start waking up to look for you at night. So at that point, you're going to need a place for her, either on a pallet next to your bed, or even in your bed. But don't worry because she won't be jumping around in the middle of the night, so it's not that terrible. And over time, she will begin to sleep through the night again in her own room. And of course, you really need to address her feeling of feeling left out by romancing her the rest of the time. She can't be left wondering if you still love her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So, I don't think your oldest needs to sleep with you just because the baby does. But if this continues to be a big issue for her, you can tell her that she can sleep in your room if she can settle down. But if it's too hard for her to settle down, then you'll need to move everyone back to her room. So obviously, when you start that, start bedtime earlier than usual to give yourself some cushion. Of course, do a normal bedtime routine with a story in your room and dim the lights, and do some soothing massage or tapping to get her yawning. Make sure you've done roughhousing earlier in the day so her body chemistry isn't full of stress hormones and she's more able to settle down. If she starts jumping around, which she will, keep your patience. Tell her that if it's too hard for her to go to sleep in your room, you'll all go back to her room, and

then just do it; kindly, patiently do it. "It was just too hard for you to sleep in there. We can try again tomorrow night."

Dr. Laura Markham:

She'll probably have a meltdown. So if possible, do this first night on a weekend when you have adult backup for your other child. But if you do this for a few nights in a row, it's not going to take more than a week for her to settle down in your bed without jumping around if, in fact, she really wants to be in there.

### Question 30:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:22:18

A parent asks, "How should we deal with kids waking up too early in the morning when they haven't gotten enough sleep and are obviously tired and whiny, but refusing to go back to bed? They do go to bed between 7:30 and 8:00. Sometimes they aren't asleep until later and they can wake up by 6:00 AM. They are two and four."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I really sympathize here. I find it very hard to parent when kids wake you up early. It's the hardest time for me. And I trust your judgment that your kids are waking up without enough sleep. So, you're asking me how to deal with it. Once they're awake, there really is not a good way to deal with it except saintly patience. So the only good answer is prevention.

Dr. Laura Markham:

First, since their bodies aren't rested, something is waking them both up at 6:00 AM when they're still tired. That's the problem we need to solve here. Do you have blackout curtains on your windows? That might solve the entire problem. It might be that you have to separate them if one of them is waking up and waking the other. Or if it's street noise, you need a white noise machine.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Also, I think you need to move heaven and earth to get them to bed by 7:00 PM. I know they don't fall asleep until later right now, but they'll gradually get used to falling

asleep earlier. I hear that you can't put them to bed before 7:00 PM because of scheduling issues, but in your note, you say they go to bed between 7:30 and 8:00, so that's an entire half an hour to hour that you could get them to bed earlier if you really made it your top priority, and I think given your situation, it should be top priority.

### Question 31:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:23:49

Our other sleep question is from a parent who says that her three and a half year old won't go to sleep without the parents. She always wants 10 more minutes and 10 more minutes and 10 more minutes, or she has a meltdown or comes to find them, and this can go on until 10 or 10:30 at night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So I suggest you try the approach that's outlined on the Aha! Parenting website. Basically, it's okay for her to cry as long as you're there with her in the room. And you gradually move further and further away from her, and if she cries, that's fine. It sounds like you're actually able to leave her, and then she comes to find you. So you're really pretty far along in this process, because if you're there in a chair at the doorway, she can't come find you; you're there. And you very gradually move your chair further and further away until she's reliably falling asleep with you there. And if she cries because you're saying, "I'm going to leave," that's great. She gets to show you all her fears of being left alone with you not there, and you're there while she's having those fears. She gets them out of her system, she learns she can do it, and it's done.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So if you want more information on how to do that, it's on the Aha! Parenting website in the toddler section, and it's called "Helping Your Toddler Learn To Put Himself To Sleep".

**Question 32:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:25:14 A parent asks, "I have a four-year-old and a 15-month-old. They both sleep in the bed with me, and my husband is sleeping on the couch. What can we do to help them sleep by themselves?" The answer is you can help your kids sleep in their own beds, even the 15-month-old. Once your boys learn to fall asleep in the bed without you there, they will sleep through the night.

Dr. Laura Markham: You say you're short of space, but you have a toddler-size bed crib beside your bed that no one is sleeping on. Can both boys fit into that? Can the four-year-old fit into it? Can only the 15-month-old fit into it? You need a place for them to sleep. That would be the starting point. I would consider getting a mattress on the floor that both boys will fit on and letting them sleep together, if they're going to be in your room anyway, if you're saying you don't have another room for them.

Dr. Laura Markham: If they can be in their own room, that's even better. Please just follow the instructions on the Aha! Parenting website in the toddler sleep section, how to get your child to sleep. I think that it will take a couple of months, and you'll have your boys happily sleeping in their own bed through the night, and your husband won't have to sleep on the couch anymore.

**Question 33:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:26:33 A parent says that her five-year-old still struggles with bed time. It can take so long to calm her. She rarely goes to sleep without a parent sitting next to her. How great that you're now able to control your own emotions and stay calm, you're saying, since this course, and that you're working on connection with her. Now, it's time to teach her to go to sleep by herself. This is outlined on the Aha! Parenting website.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As you've heard me say, I'd start with the toddler section, and then also look at the preschool section. It will take a few months. At the end of that time, your daughter will be going to sleep by herself. She'll have cried during those sessions with you, but you won't have to leave her alone to cry. You'll be there. Those tears will actually help her work through her fear. Yes, she'll be doing some backpack unloading at night, but that's what she has to do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's when the fear will come up. That's fine because you'll just make bedtime a little earlier for a while to give you time to do that work. You'll find that she will get through it, especially if you're using all the preventative maintenance tools on a daily basis during the day. Then you'll find that your evening sessions, she goes right to tears instead of anger, and you get through it a lot faster.

#### Question 34:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:27:52

Our next sleep question is from two parents who say, "Our nine-year-old son has ADHD, and he gets defiant, especially before bedtime. He still can't sleep through the night on his own. Getting him to bed and keeping him there is proving very challenging." It does sound like anxiety is what's keeping your son from sleeping through the night on his own. That would also explain his defiance before bedtime.

Dr. Laura Markham:

A lot of kids with ADHD are more anxious, and kids do get defiant when they're anxious. Again, I think your son can learn to put himself to sleep. Of course, once he can put himself to sleep, he's not going to wake up during the night looking for you. This is a very valuable skill by the time you're nine, and it is true that there are many nine-year-olds, even ones without ADHD, who do struggle to fall asleep by themselves, who get anxious when they're left alone in the dark, but it's completely possible to teach him to do it.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would use a version of what's on the Aha! Parenting website, as I keep saying, start with the toddler section. Read that. Then read the preschooler (article), and adapt that to him.

About your son's general defiance, not the sleep defiance but just the general defiance, that's a sign he's dysregulated, feeling threatened by whatever it is. When he gets defiant, remember, it's not a discipline problem. I often say it's a relationship problem or a connection problem, but really it's a safety problem. Connection solves it because it reassures the child. When your son gets defiant, remind yourself that he feels unsafe, and work to reestablish safety. I think you'll see the defiance will melt away.

### Question 35:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:29:46

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Sometimes my almost three-year-old son will agree to something, but then when it comes time to do it, he gets upset. For example, at night before bed, he wants to cuddle with me. Sometimes, he'll say he wants to cuddle with dad instead. And then he asks for me again even though I've already said good night. He gets so sad. I don't want to leave him to cry in his crib, so I go in and sit with him again, but that adds a lot of time and stress to the evening."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Yes, this is the problem. When they don't have much prefrontal cortex yet, the planning function isn't developed. Over time, he will develop that prefrontal cortex, but what can you do in the meantime? When he says, "I want to be with daddy instead of you," you say, "Okay, I'm going to give you big hugs and kisses, but then I won't be here. I'm going to leave. I'm going to leave your room, and I won't be in the house, so you need to stay with daddy then, alright?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then when you leave and he cuddles with dad, and then when dad says good night and he gets sad and cries and wants mommy, you do not go back in. His dad is with him. He's safe. If he cries and he's sad, his dad is with him. Dad can help him work through those feelings that he's so sad because he's missing mommy. "I know. You said for her to go and you wanted me, but now you want mommy again. I understand, but you have daddy."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Your husband can help him until he's done with his sadness, and then he can go to sleep. I don't think your husband should walk out and leave him crying, but I think then when you go back in, it's stressful, right? This is how he starts to learn that choices do have real outcomes, and he starts to develop that prefrontal cortex. When he makes a choice, if it's not a super important choice, sure, he can make a different choice, but this sounds like it's totally stressing your home out. It's lengthening the bedtime routine. Once this happens a few times, he's not going to then ask for you again. He's going to know that no matter how much he cries at that point, you're not going to come back in. I think you'll find that everything will settle down, that he will learn that whatever choice he makes, that's what's going to happen, and that either way, it's either his mom or his dad, and he's safe, and it's all good.

### Question 36:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:32:26

A parent says, "My three-and-a-half-year-old relies on touching my belly to fall asleep, but I find myself flinching or just hating his touch." Your body has become your son's sleep association. Just as for some children, a lovie or nursing or rocking to sleep is their sleep association. That's something that signals to the person that it's time to sleep. For an adult, that may be your own bed and pillow in a dark room. Our little ones learn to associate a particular experience with falling asleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Then when they wake up at night, they need that experience to fall asleep again. Just like for you, if you woke up and your pillow was gone, you might have a hard time falling asleep.

When your child has a sleep association like touching your body, that depends on your willingness to be there every time they need to fall asleep at night or to fall back asleep when they wake up. Touching your body is not an unusual sleep association. Many moms say it does start to become uncomfortable for them at some point. I think that discomfort must communicate itself to your child who feels it and feels uncomfortable, maybe even blames themselves, but they can't give up the habit because otherwise, they don't know how to fall asleep.

Obviously, this kind of association is not ideal for your child because they're not in control of their own sleep habit. They depend on you. Since your son is three-and-a-half, and you're no longer comfortable with this habit, I urge you to help him transition to another sleep association.

Now, children naturally have no interest in changing a sleep association, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. The best way is to help them learn a new habit. In your case, you say that your son is already sucking his fingers while he touches your belly. I know a dentist would tell you to break that sleep association, but I would say don't try to do both at once. At least his own fingers, that's something he can control. I suggest you let him continue to suck his fingers, but give him something to do with this other hand besides touch you.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The most obvious thing would be to let him choose a tactile blanket or a stuffed animal to touch. That means you're going to have to have a discussion with him about this. Tell him you love him and you love to snuggle him, but he needs to fall asleep without needing someone else's body, even yours, but he can have a blankie or a stuffed animal. Is there one that he wants to use that he already has, or does he want to buy a new one?

Dr. Laura Markham: You might think of this as a form of weaning. Remember, it's a real loss to him, but also that it's developmentally appropriate that he move toward more independence in this way. You might even have a special celebration the way you would with a weaning. Then affirm that it might be hard when he wants to touch your belly, but just like he used to touch your breast and he was able to transition to your belly, now he can transition from your belly to his lovie, and you will help him.

Dr. Laura Markham: He's likely to cry and protest the first few nights, but he will be able to make this transition as long as you give him a lot of love during it. In other words, snuggle and comfort. Just don't let him switch to another part of your body. Stay with him so he feels your presence, but give him the lovie to stroke. The important thing here is for you to be committed to this transition and compassionate.

### Question 37:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:35:45 A parent says, "My child has no issue getting herself to sleep but then calls to me several times during the night and wants connection. The constant waking is very disruptive to everyone's sleep."

Yes, you want to reassure her, but you also need to sleep yourself. On the other hand, for three-year-olds, they're developmentally designed to sleep with another person, an adult or a sibling, so it's very common for a three-year-old to wake up at night, but usually, we see that when a parent lies down with the child and the child then goes to sleep, but wakes up later and looks for the parent because the parent is their sleep association.

Dr. Laura Markham: In your case, your child has no issue getting herself to sleep. She doesn't have you as a sleep association, but somehow during the night when she gets to a lighter stage in the sleep cycle, something is waking her up, and she's looking for reassurance from you. I would start by just

looking to see what could be waking her up in her room. Is there noise while she's sleeping? Does she need blackout curtains? Does she need to pee?

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's just unusual for children to wake up several times a night every night when the parent is not helping the child fall asleep, so I would first look for causes that are making her wake up. Then I would talk with her about the need to put herself back to sleep. Tell her that you're always there if she really needs you, but you also know that she can put herself back to sleep. Ask her what she thinks she needs to be able to roll over, snuggle up, and help herself go back to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

What would she need to say to herself so that she would feel comfortable? Then tell her that you're not going to come into her room, but if she really wants you, she could come into your room. You don't have to let her in your bed. She could lie next to your bed on a blanket on the floor. I'm betting she won't want to get out of her warm bed to come and find you. Finally, she is only three, and you're asking a lot of her. I would consider in this case, making it work for her with some kind of reward.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I rarely use rewards with kids because it can give them the wrong message. For instance, if you reward kids for sharing, they share less. But when you're trying to develop a new habit that the child has to buy into that they don't see any reason to do, sometimes it can be very useful. Two examples would be sleep and potty training. Another might be weaning. You might talk with her about what she could choose as a special present if she's able to sleep through the night in her own bed for a whole night without waking you up.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It could be a small present, a very small one. That's just for one night, but that way, you're setting her up for success. You move toward that one night. The first night, she might not make it, and you can say, "Oh, but you only woke me up twice. You're moving in the right direction." Brainstorm with her ways that she could put herself back to sleep because now you're her partner. You're her backup.

Dr. Laura Markham: She wants a particular thing, and you're helping her brainstorm ways that she can get it by helping her learn to feel more comfortable in her own bed. Once she does get that small, very small present, it can be a very small thing, she'll be really happy and proud of herself, and you will be encouraging of her and say, "How great that you made it through the whole night and didn't wake me up. I wonder. Do you think you can do that again tonight?"

Dr. Laura Markham: That's why it has to be a small present. Just play it night by night by night, but after a week of this, she's going to learn to sleep through the night in her own bed. All kids do eventually learn to do it. I think your daughter will too.

### Question 38:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:39:57 A parent says, "My son who's 10 screams and cries if I don't sleep with him at night until he falls asleep. He says he's scared. Also, sometimes he accidentally touches my breasts. I get angry because I think he did it on purpose. How should I react?"

Dr. Laura Markham: First of all about your breasts, they're your body. Nobody should be touching your breasts without your permission. I think you sit him down and you say, "I notice sometimes you touch my breasts, and it seems like an accident, but maybe it's not. Sweetheart, it's natural that you would be curious about breasts, and that's okay. And you can ask me, and I'm happy to talk to you about women's bodies, but you may not touch anyone's body without permission, and that especially goes for private parts of the body like breasts. So please do not touch my breasts, but anytime you want a hug from me or a snuggle, I am always here to hug you. I love hugging you." Then you give him a hug. You don't embarrass him with any more discussion about it.

Now as far as sleep goes, I think your son can learn to sleep by himself. He may even be frightened falling asleep. Often when we lie down to go to sleep, all this stuff in our

emotional backpack, all the unsolved issues from the day come flooding up and overwhelm us and make us a little scared. Be sure you're using the basic peaceful parenting tools. Make sure he's laughing.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Make sure he gets one-on-one time with you. Make sure you're empathizing and that will help him to not feel so overwhelmed at bedtime. Really, the laughter does diminish anxiety at bedtime or just in general, but also at bedtime if you laugh with him earlier in the day. So really make sure he's getting laughter. Then you want to teach him the skill of relaxing himself so he's able to fall asleep. I highly recommend audios for kids at this age whose minds are busy and who have a hard time falling asleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

“Stress-free Kids” has some very good ones. There are others listed on Amazon, so find an audio that he enjoys and that he'll listen to by himself without you there in the room as he's falling asleep. Please go to the part of the website where I explain how to help a child fall asleep by themselves, because he hasn't really gained that skill yet because he's been insisting that you lie down with him.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That article is in the toddler section of the website, because that's often when parents begin to teach their children to fall asleep without them, but it applies just as much to a 10-year-old. Please don't belittle your child for being scared and needing you, but also don't be afraid to teach him to fall asleep by himself.

### Question 39:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:42:57

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our almost three-year-old son has a hard time sleeping or resting when he's tired. We recognize his signs of tiredness. We acknowledge it and try to help him nap or go to bed, but he refuses to sleep both day and night. As a result, he gets hyperactive. He starts being defiant, and he melts down."

I'm hearing that your not yet three-year-old resists sleep when he's tired. That's not unusual.

Dr. Laura Markham:

In fact, it's completely normal, but obviously, he's not ready yet to decide how much he sleeps, so he doesn't get to decide when it's bedtime. Your job is to have a regular bedtime at the same time every day with a routine. And your routine earlier in the day -- not right before bedtime - - he needs roughhousing to get him laughing. Because that keeps the stress hormones in his body at low enough levels that he can relax more easily at night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Of course the routine at night and before nap time needs connection rituals and reading, so he feels safe with you, snuggling.

Of course, he needs to go to bed before he gets hyperactive. What happens when kids stay up too late is, they have to pump all these stress hormones into their body, like adrenaline, to keep themselves energized. It's like when you and I get tired, and we start drinking coffee, well then, once he does that and his body is full of adrenaline and cortisol, he can't relax to go to sleep.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's when he gets difficult and defiant and has the meltdowns. Now if he does get difficult and defiant and has a meltdown, that's fine. You sit with him, and you empathize with him. "You really don't want to go to bed. You're never tired. But still Sweetie, it's rest time for your body. Everyone in the world is going to sleep. Nighty night. Nighty night to all the birds in the trees. Nighty night to everything in the room. Everything's going to sleep now."

Dr. Laura Markham:

You lie next to him if you need to get him to go to sleep, but he can't see it as an optional thing to go to bed. You said that he refuses. He's not even three years old, so he can't refuse. It's your job to be the grownup here. Now, if you find this too difficult, to make this transition to this way of helping him get to sleep, both nap time and bedtime, I would just not worry about the nap time. Start with bedtime.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, he will be over-tired at that time, but it's going to undermine your relationship to have two big limits in one day. It might be that he actually isn't tired for naps. We don't know. If he does seem very tired for nap, then put him in the car, and let him fall asleep while you run errands so he can get a bit of sleep without a fight.

You ask how to help him accept and go to sleep when he's tired. He may not. He may not accept. Frankly, I have a hard time accepting and going to sleep when I'm tired, and I'm a grownup. But he will eventually realize that this is a limit he can't change, so there's no point in resisting it. He does need to go along with you when you say it's bedtime. If you can stay in a good mood about it and make a good connection time, he'll begin to want that warm connection with you even more than he wants to stay up all night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

By the way, if you haven't read the information on the Aha! Parenting website on this, there's a lot of information on bedtime for toddlers. Just go look it up in the toddler section.

#### Question 40:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:46:23

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My four-and-a-half-year-old daughter is extremely sensitive and strong-willed. She refuses to go to bed. In the mornings, we tell her to wait until her green light comes on to get out of bed, but she refuses and wakes everyone up in the house. She also refuses to nap, even though she gets tired in the afternoon. Her bedtime is 6:00 to 6:30, and she wakes up between 5:00 and 6:00 in the morning."

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad tidings here because it does sound like this is really tough. I myself hated it when my kids would wake up at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. I'm not a morning person. The truth is that most four year olds don't nap.

- Dr. Laura Markham: Mary Sheedy Kurcinka wrote a book about spirited children; she also has a book called *Sleepless in America*, which is a really great book on sleep that I would recommend to you. What she says is your child is ready to give up their nap "when the battle to get them to nap is more exhausting to you than the child's behavior that caused you to think he or she needed the nap."
- Dr. Laura Markham: I wouldn't fight with your strong-willed daughter about a nap. I would snuggle and read and have a rest time. If she's not asleep in 45 minutes, then no nap is necessary. I have to say, she's going to bed very early for a four-and-a-half-year-old. Most four and a half year olds sleep 11 to 12 hours. She is going to bed at 6:00 PM. You can assume she's going to wake up at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. That is in fact what she's doing.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I think if you want her to sleep later, you need to put her to bed at a more reasonable hour. Most four and a half year olds don't go to bed at 6:00 or 6:30 in the evening. I understand you think she should play quietly by herself when she wakes up, but again, most children don't or can't. Remember, this is a strong-willed child. If you force her to do that, you're telling her not to depend on you, so you're reinforcing her tendency to not follow your lead.
- Dr. Laura Markham: This is based on some theory that's been developed by Gordon Neufeld. He calls this the alpha complex. Some kids develop an alpha complex when they think you're not going to meet their needs. That makes them more demanding and more strong-willed.
- Dr. Laura Markham: This is especially likely to happen for very sensitive kids, and your daughter is highly sensitive. You frame this as a sleep question. I hear you, but I actually think you have a more important question. Your four-and-a-half-year-old is very strong willed, highly sensitive, so if you want her to be open to your influence and follow your lead, then you want to be there to meet her needs whenever possible. This is not a good candidate for those sleep clocks where she's not allowed to come out of her room until the green light goes on, because you're basically saying, "I don't care

what you need. I'm not going to be there for you in the mornings. I need my sleep."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Believe me, I know what that feels like. I'm just saying it doesn't work very well with a strong-willed child. I understand that she gets tired in the afternoon. All kids do. But I do think your expectations are off. Finally, if your daughter is wound up and that's why she's not sleeping easily, then please remember that half an hour of roughhousing and laughter every morning and every afternoon works wonders to help kids get those stress hormones out of their body so they can sleep more easily.

#### Question 41:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:49:50

A parent writes, "How can I help my three-year-old son get the sleep he needs? He's regularly over tired and can't calm down and sleep. Then he doesn't nap and powers through and is overtired for bedtime too. Today, he woke up at 5:45 AM, didn't nap, and struggled to go to sleep at 8:00 PM. I can easily get him to nap when I have someone to watch my one-year-old while I put him down, but if she's in the room, he can't relax. I've tried EFT without success. He asks me to stop tapping him."

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is very hard. I hear he made it from 5:45 AM until 8:00 PM without a nap, but he's only three, and he was probably very unhappy and difficult by the end of the day. The problem you're describing is that kids who are tired have to pump out cortisol and adrenaline into their systems, as I mentioned a few minutes ago. Then those stress hormones keep them from falling asleep. You have two steps here. One is to get him into a better cycle. And then you want to help him maintain that cycle.

Dr. Laura Markham:

To get him into a better cycle, I would start on the weekend or whenever you have another adult to watch your one-year-old while you're putting the three-year-old down for his nap. That morning, do a lot of laughing to

clear those stress hormones out of his system. He'll get a good nap then, because you say he will go down for a nap without his sister around. Then put him to bed earlier than usual that evening before the stress hormones have a chance to get circulating.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Repeat the next day. That will get him back onto a good cycle. Then you have the problem of how to maintain this, since he can't relax with the one-year-old there when he tries to nap. That's really what's getting you into this trouble. The most obvious answer is to put the one-year-old down to nap, and then the three-year-old. Now, that's a pretty obvious solution. Maybe you're not doing that for some reason I can't think of. Maybe the one-year-old still has a morning nap and hasn't given that up, so you can't get the one-year-old to sleep before the three-year-old.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's certainly possible. If so, that's a temporary situation because your one-year-old is very soon going to be moving to one nap a day, and so I think if you move that nap later and later, then your one-year-old will be asleep at the time that you're trying to get the three-year-old down. I think this is a temporary situation for you. Also remember, your three-year-old in a year is going to give up his nap completely, but I think right now, he still needs it, and you need a little time before that tough transition to the no-nap phase.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If you really have no other choice until your one-year-old is napping earlier, which I think you're moving toward, then I would take both kids for a drive or out in the stroller and hope your three-year-old falls asleep. That at least holds your pattern steady so that your three-year-old does get a nap and doesn't get over tired.

#### Question 42:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:52:32

Our next question is about a five-year-old."He goes to sleep in his room and will only fall asleep if we're both

sitting or lying with him. When we go to bed, we pick him up and bring him to our room. How can we use special time to work through these issues and get him to fall asleep on his own and sleep in his own room all night?"

You can play it out in special time with puppet shows and teddy bears. In fact, in the emotional intelligence chapter of the *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* book, there's an entire description of a little girl named Morgan whose parents have a similar issue where it's a very anxious child who won't go to sleep on her own, and they help her do that. That's not just in special time, that's also how you handle it in the evening. But, I would use special time for him to pick what you do mostly. You just attend to him and pour your love into him to increase your bonding and his security.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I'm a bit alarmed that he'll only fall asleep if you're both with him. This sounds to me like he must be very panicked about going to sleep if he needs both of you. So often, kids demand to have a parent there, and they freak out if there's no parent there. That's very, very common. But to insist that both parents be there and to have both parents agree to do it, it just sounds a little over the top to me. And I think he doesn't actually need both of you to feel secure. It's not that you shouldn't be responsive to his anxiety about falling asleep. You should. But I think he can't call all the shots like that. So, I do think this is an issue.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I advise you to follow the steps outlined on my website under preschoolers and sleep to help him learn to fall asleep in his own bed without you there eventually. It will take about three months to do. It only takes one parent. And if you get stuck, please get a parenting coach to do a session with you to walk you through the steps so that you can work with your son to do this.

### Question 43:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:54:45

A parent is asking about her four-year-old who's always had a problem going to bed, not falling asleep so much,

but going to bed. It ends in a massive screaming session. "We've tried everything, but we get so much resistance from him. When daddy's away, that leaves me doing both bedtimes alone, but it's still better because I'm more firm that bedtime is bedtime whereas daddy will negotiate. So bedtime ends up between 8:00 PM and midnight, and we all argue."

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, I'm sorry to say, but it sounds like you know your answer. Daddy shouldn't do bedtime if he can't stop himself from negotiating. Or he can put your one-year-old to bed while you put the four-year-old to bed. And I have to add that no matter how hard a time your son is having, and therefore giving you, that does not excuse there being screaming from the parents. It sounds like your son is used to this habit of giving you guys a hard time about going to bed. And he knows that, at least some of the time, if he does that he gets to stay up later.

Dr. Laura Markham:

It's your son's job to resist going to bed. Why should he want to go to bed, even when he's tired? Most kids don't. So it's the parent's job to firmly, kindly hold that line, and to have a sense of humor about it, and to insist that the kid goes to bed. Negotiating about it means that the child thinks it's a movable boundary. So if you set the boundary and he knows it's for real, he's going to stop resisting it. But so far, he's been trained to think that this is a negotiable boundary. So I think that's the thing that you have to do. I would just take dad out of the picture in terms of the bedtime for the four-year-old and you're the one who does bedtime for the four-year-old all the time.

Dr. Laura Markham:

And if your son is having a problem settling into bed and he needs something to look forward to, I would consider giving him some extra support, like a kid's meditation or sleep audio that he can listen to that he looks forward to. I think that's a good idea. Make it a win-win situation. But mostly, your job is to make this a boundary that does not change. It's sort of like you don't let them ride on top of the car when you're driving the car. If sometimes you let them and sometimes you don't, he's always going to insist on riding on top of the car. But it's not a boundary

that kids think is possible to budge, so they don't try. I think that's the thing about your son. He thinks that it's possible to move this boundary.

## POTTY LEARNING QUESTIONS

### Question 44:

Dr. Laura Markham: 01:57:11

This is from a parent who says, "My four-year-old is potty trained. Whenever she has to use the bathroom, it's an emergency and she has to rush. She refuses to go when we ask, especially right before bed, and it's a struggle also to get her to drink enough water."

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say fights with your child about using the toilet are not fights you're ever going to win. It already sounds like you're in a power struggle, so put the power in her hands and support her to listen to her own body signals and develop her inner compass. You're not supposed to be in charge of her body. She is. Let her be the one to decide when to go. And it's fine that she has to rush, that she leaves it till the last minute. That's what four-year-olds do.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So again, notice the positives. "Wow! You noticed your body needed to go, and you got yourself to the bathroom in time. Good for you!" Even if she ran at the last minute. Or, "You got yourself to the bathroom almost in time. Next time you'll be in time and you'll have totally dry undies. Wow."

Dr. Laura Markham:

And of course you can have a rule that everyone in the family uses the toilet right before bed. And make a funny scenario up with her, like how funny it would be if you needed to pee at night and you would be peeing in your bed and thinking you were in a swimming pool and ooh, gross. Talk to her about it and get her laughing so it's not so loaded and it's not a power struggle. Just have it be part of the bedtime routine.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You know, my daughter found it boring to sit on the toilet and boring to brush her teeth, so we took to starting our bedtime story while she's in the bathroom. She peed and I read, and she would make sure she peed every last drop so she got a longer time. I'm not saying we finished the whole book then. So she could listen more. That is another way to make it fun. So I would say she doesn't have to handle the bathroom the way you want her to. She just has to pee so she doesn't wet her bed, and there are ways you can make it work for her.

Dr. Laura Markham:

As far as drinking water goes, there are many ways to help kids drink more water. You can make it special by putting ice in it, or add a little wedge of lemon to it, or put it in a special cup or a sippy cup that has a nice mouthfeel. If she really doesn't drink water, you can even start with juice that's watered down and call it by some special name, like the superpower drink. Don't call it orange juice because then when she has orange juice she'll realize that what she's been drinking all this time is like two drops of orange juice and mostly water. So don't call it orange juice, but call it like her super princess power drink or something. And gradually keep adding more water and less juice until it's mostly water, and she'll drink the water.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I would say, access really matters because your daughter likes to be in charge of herself. I can tell from your note about her toileting issue. So make sure she has total access to water. You could just have a stool and paper cups easily accessible that she can get her own water, and make a big deal about how she's in charge of it. With my daughter, who was very strong-willed at this age, we got a water container, like one of those big bottles of water. Just because of where we lived, it was a good thing to have. We didn't have a filter because we were not going to be in the house for long. We didn't want to install one. So she would go and get herself water from that spout, and we put something under it, a mat to catch any drips, and she could get water whenever she wanted it. She's still a huge water drinker because to her it was a way to be autonomous, to get her water. I think if you can find ways too for your daughter to have water, where she's

autonomous getting it, you won't be able to keep her away from the water probably.

#### Question 45:

- Parent: 02:00:51 Hi. So I have an almost-four-year-old and a one-month-old. My little one is going through a tough time, as expected in terms of transitioning. I know you talked a little bit earlier about going to the bathroom and figuring out rituals, and we've tried that and had a game and everything, but she's still consistently having accidents pretty much for the past month. We see this when she undergoes transitions with new schools and whatnot. Maybe it's something that will pass eventually, but we haven't been putting her in pull-ups and whatnot. We're trying to read on the toilet and get that to be a ritual. Even if she goes a little bit, she still manages to wet the bed every night. And maybe that's not a big deal, but just looking for some advice.
- Dr. Laura Markham: How coincidental that you have a one-month-old baby in the house and in the last month your four-year-old is having accidents, right?
- Parent: Yeah.
- Dr. Laura Markham: I mean, of course. Every knows that children regress when there's a new baby in the house. But then when they do it, when they wet their bed or act like brats, we're like, "Why are they doing that? Don't do that." But they do it for a reason, obviously.
- Dr. Laura Markham: So the reason in this case is the new baby, and there's not much you can do about that except to help her with her feelings about the baby and help her feel safe so she knows that she really is still completely loved even though there's a new baby in the house. I would say talk with her about how much you love her, how she's the big sister. Make everything about her as much as you can. Make sure she gets one-on-one time with both parents. Don't separate. A lot of parents will do this thing where they'll have the mom with the new baby and the dad with the

older kid. Don't do that. I mean, you can do some of that, but if that's the setup you have, you're damaging the relationship with mom, and also the older kid is going to have regression because they've lost a very important relationship for them. I should ask you, do you have my siblings book?

Parent: No, I don't, actually

Dr. Laura Markham: The whole last third of the sibling book is all about how to handle having a new baby. And it starts before you have the new baby, so I wish you'd had it eight weeks ago, but that's okay. Even now would be really helpful. Because so often, I see that families get into a bad pattern when they have a new baby and the older kid is having a hard time and they don't quite know what to do with older kid. You sound to me like you do understand what's going on with her, so you're not setting up a bad pattern, but I think it would still be really helpful for you to get the tips to use. Have you looked at the Aha! Parenting websites sibling section yet?

Parent: Yeah. I looked there. I mean, I think part of the issue is she's had this problem with any other transition. Like going to a new school, it took about a month and a half of consistent wetting. She just takes a while to adjust, so maybe that's just the way she is and I just need to accept that and realize it's going to go away eventually. I don't know. I've seen it before besides just this instance.

Dr. Laura Markham: Right. So it's not just the new baby you're saying.

Parent: Right.

Dr. Laura Markham: So you know, if you think about it from her point of view, she's almost four. It's hard to make it to the bathroom on time. You and I have been doing it our whole lives, but she's not used to that. So when there's some other demand, like she's in a new school, and you have to learn new things, and everything is a little unnerving, she's going to have a hard time handling all of those demands. That's just the way it works. And the new baby as well. I think she

won't be doing it when she's 16, when anything new happens. So you know, that's okay. She won't be doing it then. But you can expect it even for a little while if something big happens in her life.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But I'd say the more you can reassure her and create a sense of safety, and the more you can, again, minimize the anxiety in her body, which means get her laughing, that also should really help. I think you'll find that it shouldn't take her too long to recover. I don't have any great ideas except start at the source. Do you know what I'm saying? I think it's really key. I would not get into power struggles about it. I would be very matter of fact about it because this is just a tiny little stumbling block. You don't want to blow it out of proportion.

Parent:

Right, right. Okay. Perfect. Thank you so much.

#### Question 46:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:05:45

A parent is asking about her seven-year-old and going to the toilet. So, you said it seems like a power struggle and you're sure you've been too controlling. You say, "What is your body saying to you? How urgently do you need to go on a scale of 1 to 10?" and you always pee before you leave the house. That's all great. Since last summer, there were no pee accidents at night.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Now, the fact that there are accidents at night is very interesting to me. That does not sound like a power struggle. Pee accidents at night at the age of seven come from one of two places. One is there's a regulation issue in the brain and the child might also sleepwalk or talk in their sleep, or maybe one of the parents did. One of the parents probably wet their bed at the age of seven. That has nothing to do with toileting during the day. Zero.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Pee accidents at night, if that's what's happening, I wouldn't worry about it. Your child will outgrow it. And

you can use an alarm. The research shows, teach them to get up and pee at night if they need to. So I wouldn't worry about nighttime. That's no big deal at all. Really, none.

Dr. Laura Markham:

The other reason, sometimes that kids have nighttime accidents is constipation. If kids are constipated, the bladder is being pushed on, and so the kids have leakage, and they often can't make it through a whole night without peeing, or they have leakage at night. Even if she has a bowel movement every day, unless the bowel movements are quite soft, I would consider asking your pediatrician if she could have an X-ray of her gastrointestinal tract so you can see if she's backed up. Because that is a very common reason for kids having accidents at night if that's what's happening.

Dr. Laura Markham:

You say there have been no pee accidents during the night. So I don't understand. Are there pee accidents at night?

Parent:

Yes.

Dr. Laura Markham:

She is still having accidents at night. So since last summer, no pee accidents at night, but you're now you're saying yes. She is having accidents at night.

Parent:

Well, yeah, I went to the doctor's. She's taking some laxatives.

Dr. Laura Markham:

Good.

Dr. Laura Markham:

So they do think she's constipated.

Parent:

Yeah because she's always holding her pee back during the day.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's different, if she holds it during the day. You want to help her let go and pee during the day. Does she actually go into the toilet and sit down and pee at regular intervals or not?

Parent:

Yeah, now we bought a watch, so she always goes.

Dr. Laura Markham: Then that's great. It sounds like you have found a way. You know what I would also do? When she goes in to pee, make it fun so she relaxes. One great way to do that is bubbles. If you give her bubbles to blow while she's on the toilet, it's fun to blow bubbles. You leave them in the bathroom, high up. That's the only time she uses them. But here's the thing, when she blows the bubbles, it relaxes her ability to pee. It relaxes the muscles that hold back the pee and she can't hold it back anymore. When you blow ... you'll feel it happen, that your muscles down there relax. So if you can give her bubbles to blow on, that will help her to relax and blow.

Dr. Laura Markham: Here's what I would say, one, you should not have control. This is all in her hands. I would leave it all in her hands. Two, make it fun for her when she does go in the bathroom. I love that she has a watch. Add the bubbles. And three, I would really keep an eye on the constipation. If they think she needs a laxative, that might be what's going on because I often see that kids who are constipated do have accidents. And in fact there's a book about this written by Dr. Steve Hodges, H-O-D-G-E-S, called *It's No Accident*. So take a look at that. And you can listen. If you put his name into the search box on my website, [ahaparenting.com](http://ahaparenting.com), you can listen to an interview with him for free, which describes this.

Parent: Awesome.

Dr. Laura Markham: You don't even have to read the book.

Parent: Great.

Dr. Laura Markham: You listen to the interview and I think-

Dr. Laura Markham: You listened to it already?

Parent: Well, actually, I read about it. She now has poop accidents.

Dr. Laura Markham: Poop accidents are a sign of constipation.

Dr. Laura Markham:

They're a sign that the child's insides are overstuffed and stretched out in a way they shouldn't be. So then the child no longer is able to notice the signals that are coming from the body, and the child doesn't know when to go. Therefore, there's what we would call leakage where the poop can leak out in small amounts, but the child isn't really in charge of it. Do whatever you need to do to get her help here and get her cleaned out. It takes probably at least three months, if not six months, for the body to go back to normal and recover the child's ability to be in charge of their own bowels. But start with D Steve Hodges. He has a Facebook page. There's my interview on the website, and he has a book. Okay?

Parent:

Thanks so much.

#### Question 47:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:11:22

This is from a parent who says, "My four-and-a-half-year old daughter was extremely difficult to potty train. After two years of struggling, backing off, and trying again, we started giving her treats for going number two. It escalated. Now she gets an ice cream pop every day. What can we do to remove the treats without having her regress again?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

Well, this is one problem with rewards. Most kids begin to get some intrinsic satisfaction out of the developmental leap of using the toilet so they don't regress, even as the treats fade away. But I know that parents often worry about how they're going to break the treat habit. So at least this is only an ice cream pop every day rather than every time she uses the toilet. I would wait until potty learning is very established and then I don't think she'll regress.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I've heard two ways that parents have dealt with this. One is to give her a big party, just for family, where she gets one big present that she really wants instead of the ice

cream pop and you say to her, "From now on, you're not going to get an ice cream pop every day, but you're going to have this big party where you get all the different kinds of ice cream you want in one party plus a present." And of course be prepared after the party that she's going to miss the pop, but have smaller things that you can distract her with to help her feel better for a few days.

Dr. Laura Markham:

She might have a meltdown. That's fine. As you know, I think meltdowns are just fine. And you should be understanding. But you know, it is life. This is the big present, and pops are not good for you to have every day, so this is the way it is. The other option, if you don't think that's going to work, is to simply make the pop a daily treat rather than a reward for using the potty. So you break the link between the ice cream pop and going to the potty. She doesn't get it when she uses the potty. She gets it every night after dinner. And gradually, it just becomes something that your family does and that's the dessert she gets every night after dinner. It has nothing to do with going to the potty, right? So if there's a day she doesn't go to the potty, she still gets the ice cream pop. And if you forget the pop, it has nothing to do with the potty, obviously.

Dr. Laura Markham:

But, of course, if your family's having a different dessert that night, then she doesn't have that because you don't get two desserts in one day. So gradually over time, you can change your dessert policy so you don't have to have dessert every day. And I don't recommend dessert every day. Over time, the treat sort of fades, but that's a longer fadeout if you do it that way.

#### Question 48:

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:13:42

Our next question is from a parent who says, "Our six-year-old twins have a habit of resisting us. We're working on reconnecting with them, but one of them is struggling with encopresis. We're trying to implement your

recommendations from your website, but he refuses to try. He's been dealing with this since he was three and a half, around the time he was potty trained. And when he's really uncomfortable, he lashes out at us, screaming, hitting, destroying things. How can we best support him so he can learn to help himself?"

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is so hard, and it's very common for kids when they're potty trained. I say very common. There are a number of children when they're potty trained who end up holding or retaining the feces in their body and their internal organs actually get out of shape from being swollen up, and the children lose their ability to actually tell when they need to go and they get scared of going. It's just really hard. And of course they're in pain, so they're miserable. I would say no wonder he gets angry. And he refuses to try because he feels victimized here and he doesn't see a way that he could be part of a good solution.

Dr. Laura Markham:

He needs medical treatment immediately. Of course, I can't give you medical advice about encopresis. I'm not a physician, I'm a psychologist. But it's a very serious physical issue. In the past few years, researchers have evolved their ideas about how to handle it, so I'm glad you mentioned that article on my website because it's actually time I rewrote it based on the latest medical advice. The resource I would recommend you to use is Steve Hodges H-O-D-G-E-S. He's an expert in this area. He has a book out called The M.O.P. Book, M-O-P. Don't wait. Call Hodges up and get a telephone consultation. He's used to dealing with resisting children.

Dr. Laura Markham:

I find his books are great for kids because they really take the shame out of what's in fact often a shameful topic for kids. I just think you have to deal with this before you deal with anything else. That's number one. And number two, I think reconnecting with both of your sons is really important. And use the preventive maintenance tools from last week, and all the tools we've talked about in this course, to connect with both of your boys. Your son needs all the support he can get to rebuild his confidence.

**Question 49:**

Dr. Laura Markham: 02:16:08

Our next question is from a parent who says, "My son turned three in April. He was showing signs of interest in potty training but then his sister was born. It was a tough transition. He's enrolled in a great preschool starting in August, but they require kids to be potty trained. He knows when he needs to go. He asks for privacy in a separate room. But when we suggest sitting on the potty, we are met with staunch refusal.

Dr. Laura Markham:

This is a tough one because power struggles with somebody about their body are not power struggles you will win. I guess the real question is, is he motivated to go to the preschool? If so, then take him on a visit there. Let him play with the stuff, including outside on the play equipment. Get him excited about the preschool. And then have them welcome him and explain to him that all the kids there use the potty instead of diapers and they'll help him. Then when you leave, you can offer to be his assistant to help him get used to the potty. There's an article on my website on potty learning that will help you do that.

Dr. Laura Markham:

What if he's not motivated to go to the great preschool? I would reconsider whether it's the right time to do it. I think the problem is he doesn't want to get potty trained. He's had a tough transition to the new baby. If there's any way you can put off the preschool until December, he might be more ready to do it and you can gradually get him interested in the potty.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If that's not an option and you need to start him in preschool, well, this is where I part ways with these preschools. I think it's a terrible thing to rush kids into being potty trained. It becomes training, not learning, and they're not motivated to do it, and you end up with lots of accidents or the children holding in their poop, and that doesn't work so well. So I'm hoping that he is motivated to go to the preschool and that that idea will work.

Dr. Laura Markham:

If it won't work, then start by reading on my website all the material that is there. There's a great deal of it. There are letters in addition to the basic article on potty training. Take a look at those and see if you can start him peeing in the potty at the very least. That training will be the most important training for him to have done by August. Then you can probably start him half days in the preschool, and then he won't have to actually poop in the potty at preschool. You can give him a diaper to poop in when he gets home and gradually transition him. There's a lot of information on my website about how to make the transition when kids insist on a diaper to poop in because it's just so common for them to be potty trained in relationship to pee but not poop. That's often secondary for kids. I wish you luck.

Dr. Laura Markham:

That's all our questions for today. Thank you for listening, and I hope this was helpful. If you still have a burning question that wasn't answered on this audio, please submit it for possible inclusion on my podcast. Just go to [ahaparenting.com/podcast](http://ahaparenting.com/podcast) and leave your question as a voice memo. This is Dr. Laura Markham, wishing you less drama and more love. Goodbye for now.