Bedtime Pass program curbs sleep resistance

◆ Moore BA, et al. *J Pediatr Psychol.* 2007;32:283-287.

An extinction-based procedure was effective in treating bedtime resistance among typically developing children without leading to an initial increase in the problem behavior, according to a randomized controlled trial of 19 youths ages 3 to 6 years.

Bedtime resistance, including crying and leaving the bedroom, is a common problem encountered by primary care pediatricians. Typical methods to curb bedtime battles involve variations of a procedure known as extinction, in which parents are told to ignore their child's crying or bids for attention. However, periods of prolonged and intense crying or "extinction bursts" often occur before the bedtime resistance subsides. As a result, parents often do not follow the program.

This study tested a variation of extinction and measured parents' satisfaction with the program. Participants included 11 girls and eight boys who exhibited bedtime resistance, defined as crying, calling out or leaving the room after bedtime, at least three nights per week.

During a seven-night baseline phase, parents collected data on planned and actual bedtime, time to quiet, and the number of times the child left the room each night. Children then were randomized to the treatment group or control group.

Those in the treatment group were given a Bedtime Pass, a card they could exchange for one parental visit to satisfy an acceptable request such as a drink or a hug. Afterward, they gave up the pass, and parents ignored subsequent bids for attention. Those in the control group did not use a Bedtime Pass and continued as usual.

Results showed that children in the intervention group called out and cried less often than the control group at post-test, and there was no extinction burst.

In addition, children in the control group showed no difference in time to quiet (about 40 minutes), while those in the experimental group showed significant reductions (from 43 minutes to 25 minutes).

Finally, 93% of children in the experimental group had near-zero departures from their rooms compared with 44% in the control group. All treatment effects were maintained at three-month follow-up. Parents also had a high degree of satisfaction with the Bedtime Pass program.