

NIGHTMARES OR NIGHT TERRORS

Night terrors and nightmares are often confused as the same thing but the two are completely different.

Nightmares are unpleasant dreams, occurring in dream sleep (REM), that are remembered upon waking. A night terror takes place during non-REM sleep and may involve a child screaming, thrashing around and sweating while still asleep, and won't be remembered the next day.

Nightmares are more common than terrors but neither cause any psychological harm to your child.

Here are our tips on telling them apart and how to handle them:

Night Terrors

- Usually happen shortly after going to sleep, and last for several minutes
- Common in children aged between 3 and 8 years old
- Your child will appear to be terrified but is actually asleep
- Your child won't take comfort from you

What to do

- Keep calm, wait for the terror to pass... Do they need to be settled back to sleep?
- Don't try to intervene unless their safety is compromised
- When these are regular try rousing your child 10 minutes before they usually happen for two weeks to break the cycle
- It can help to keep a regular bedtime and a relaxing wind down routine
- Make sure the room isn't too warm, around 18 degrees is ideal
- Children usually grow out of night terrors, but if you are concerned consult your GP

Nightmares

- Are bad dreams that children wake from
- Occur in the second half of the night
- Common in children aged 3 to 6 years old
- Can be caused by watching a scary movie or worry/anxiety
- Your child will take comfort from you

What to do

- Reassure them that it was a dream
- Talk to them to find out if anything is worrying them
- Don't reinforce the nightmare – there is no need to look under beds for monsters as they don't exist remember!
- Practice a relaxing bedtime routine
- See a GP if nightmares persist or are occurring from a traumatic event

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For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at thesleepcharity.org.uk or contact us on info@thesleepcharity.org.uk