Bedtime Battles with Kids: Why ADHD & Anxious Kids Can’t Settle at Night Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Why Bedtime Triggers Meltdowns

Your child is unfocused, distracted, and exhausted, but suddenly wide awake the second you say, time for bed. Haven't we all been there and seen this?

I mean, it doesn't matter if your kid is five or 25. Some kids are just tired and wired more easily. And you might see that, you know, your kids is sitting around after school and exhausted and yawning and zoning out and focused.

But then when bedtime hits, Now they're asking for one more minute or one, more snack or more question, one or hug, or I need more time on my device. But then what happens is they melt down when you say no, and it's just such chaos at night.

And I know nighttime can feel very chaotic for a lot of families. I spend a long time talking about things like sleep hygiene, which is basically your sleep ritual to help you get to sleep.

And that works. This is something that we use for kids. It's something we used for adults. So let's think about this when we're having kids that are really having a hard time.

We have to start thinking about what's happening. Are they more awake right now? Or are they really just stimulated? Because when the problem starts, We may be thinking about really that moment, but is it just that their whole day they've been holding it in, they have school restraint collapse, They have a clinical issue, their neurodivergent.

Understanding Nervous System Overload

They're just a kid who's sensitive to their environment. There's nothing wrong with any of these things, But it may, be that's where it's finally showing up that that stress cup really starts to overflow.

Let's talk about this from the nervous system perspective. So your kids holding together, all day, hopefully getting learning outcomes that everybody's happy with.

They're trying really hard in transitions and being engaged, but their nervous system has been on all-day. Their managing attention, expectations, emotions, stimulation, transitions, peers, everything.

And for kids with ADHD or other forms of neurodivergence, they're pushing through regulation challenges all days. for anxious kids, it means holding tension in internally.

And both of these take a lot of energy, takes a lots of just constant vigilance and managing your environment, and that has an expense. We're glad kids are doing well, but how are we removing some of that stress?

So when the house finally gets quiet, their nervous system doesn't relax. it releases. That's a big part of what happens because they're used to this constant stimulation.

So let's talk about what's happening. During the day, your child has a lot of structure. They might have movement, they might things built into their system that provide not just the structure in the routine, but a constancy that provides cueing for their nervous system.

But at night, all of that goes away for a lot of people. And what's left is for anxious kids, they might be experiencing racing thoughts, worries, replaying the day.

For ADHD kids they may feel restlessness in their body. They might have the burst of energy because just because you're tired doesn't mean you are going to lay down.

It could mean that you see these hyperactive behaviors or you know, that wired to try to combat the tiredness. So you'll see difficulty slowing down.

Why the Evening Transition Is So Hard

And what it looks like is resistance. What we think of resistance, really what is often is a nervous system that doesn't know how to shift states from either being in high gear to low gear, low geared, high geared.

We see that, and these are kids that have a hard time with transition. Bedtime requires a transition away from activation. to regulation. You have to have that ability to do that.

And for dysregulated kids, that transition is the hardest part of the day. Now, your kid may show it up, show at a different time, but it is a very common thing for nighttime to be hard.

So let's talk about real world strategies. I always want you to walk out of here with at least one thing that you feel like you can do, But you've got to actually implement.

Okay. So you're going to build a real bridge into bedtime. Most parents go from full stimulation, lots of sports, lacks activities and say, go to bed.

Now, every once in a while you meet a kid who can do that. I don't know too many kids like that and it's just too abrupt for a dysregulated nervous system.

Instead, you've got to create a short transition window, maybe dim lights. You've heard me say a million times, I need dim lights, you have to have quieter voices.

You have something that's signaling you need to slow down. And you could add slower activities. I do that all the time at night. Slower activities, drawing, reading.

Ten minutes of reading resets your nervous system. Just saying. But we're talking ten minutes, fifteen minutes. No, you do because your kid is wired and they're not going to go to sleep unless you this.

And then what this is going do these 10, 15 minutes, it's going cue the brain and saying, we're shifting now. This helps the nervous system gradually calm down instead of pushing back.

That's huge. Number two, expect and plan for a second wind.

Building a Calmer Bedtime Routine

You've got a kid with a lot of energy. and they're overtired easily, the body is often going to release adrenaline. And that's going look like silliness, hyperactivity, resistance, and it feels like just high energy, but it's actually dysregulation.

So instead of reacting with, why are you acting like this? You're going shift to your body having a hard time settling. And then you got to slow down.

You got add some things, reduce demands, lower activity, stay steady and do some of these activities that really teach your kid, okay, it's time for my nervous system to calm down, we can't force a nervous to come down and because if you try to force it, is going to backfire on you.

You already know that. Okay, number three, stay close during the drop. So this is where most kids need co-regulation the most. Not all the time, not all night, but like really during that transition.

And be careful here. Don't get caught in the sand trap of OCD worry rituals. This is really just about doing regulation activities and just being calm.

And so that might look like sitting near them, a hand on their back, you're not there all the time, quiet voice. Maybe it is a little yoga. It is turning the lights down and reading together for 10 minutes.

You've got to find something that works for you and that's doable and you will actually do. Because we talk about these things and a lot of people give advice, but they're really not walking parents through things that make sense.

different. Your presence can really be a stabilizer for them and it helps their nervous system move from that on to safe enough to let go to regulate.

Number four, give the brain somewhere to land, especially for anxious kids. So if your child's brain turns on at night, because these are kids that need to be busy in order to avoid their anxiety.

And so then the moment they slow down, you get all this flood of worry and all that. You got to redirect it. Okay, so you can let them say, okay, You can share one worry, write it down.

you could do a quick brain dump, name one thing they're thinking about. If you don't want to validate, if you want a comedy, make this a ritual for you.

Also, get them to focus on one They did well to handle it during the day and say, okay, that's great. So that what you're going to focus on and don't get caught up in reassurance questions and things like that.

That's the kiss of death. But when you are helping the brain shift into away from the worry, it helps them.

Supporting Anxious and Wired Kids

It's going reduce the looping thoughts, which is what we want to do because anxious kids, they love to bring you in their worry. and you are not falling in that sand trap.

So instead of asking, why won't they go to sleep, you got to start asking what is keeping their nervous system activated right now. That is a huge shift away from, oh my gosh, this kid never goes to asleep.

He's 18 and it's still happening. We've got to think about what can we do to help their nervous system transition into calm and create routines and things for nighttime that, again, are doable and accessible.

Because your child isn't fighting bedtime, regardless of what their age, they're struggling with that transition, into regulation. And really, once you understand that, you stop battling behavior, and you start supporting the system underneath it.

That's huge. So if bedtime is really feeling like it's really in charge of your entire house, But you don't have to be doing this. You don' have get caught in this, and this is exactly what I walk you through.

Of course, in my beautiful book, The Disregulated Kid, how the nervous system and these patterns, which is also part of my solution matcher. If you haven't taken the solution matter ever, or if you took it before, you want to take the Solution Matcher and you just go to DrRoseanne.com because it's really a nervous-system pattern reader now.

We've updated it. and it will help you really give you guidance and give step-by-step actionable tools. I know that every resource I have, whether it's a dysregulated kid or any of the products that we have.

My goal is to bring you closer to regulation and make it so easy. Bedtime doesn't have to be the situation where it is creating chaos. and you have to just think of it as your nervous system needs just a little bit more support, a Little more structure, A little more routine to move it from activity and being on to regulate it.

And you can do it, just pick a strategy, stick with it and create calm in your nighttime. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our dysregulation insider and it will show up in Your inbox every week.