

Bedtime Calm

A 10-minute wind-down to read aloud at lights-out, in your slowest, quietest voice. Kids borrow your nervous system's pace more than they follow your words - the pauses do half the work.

Before you start

Read it after the last step of the routine - teeth brushed, lights low, child lying down. Same script every night beats a new one on hard nights: the body learns that these words mean sleep is coming. If your child asks questions to stall, say once, warmly: "Questions can wait for morning - right now we're winding down." Wherever you see (pause), count two slow breaths of your own before going on.

Part 1 - Settling in (about 2 minutes)

"Let your whole body sink into the bed... the bed is holding you, so your muscles don't have to. (pause) Now we'll do our slow breathing. Smell the flower... two, three, four. And blow out the candle... two, three, four, five, six. (pause) Again. Smell the flower... and blow out the candle... nice and long. (pause) One more, even slower."

Part 2 - The sleepy body scan (about 5 minutes)

"Now we're going to say goodnight to your body, one piece at a time. Squeeze your toes tight, tight, tight... and let them go soft. Goodnight, toes. (pause) Squeeze your legs strong like a statue... and let them melt into the bed. Goodnight, legs. (pause) Squeeze your tummy... and let it go soft and slow. Goodnight, tummy. (pause) Make fists with your hands, squeeze... and let your fingers fall open like leaves. Goodnight, hands. (pause) Scrunch your shoulders up to your ears... and let them drop. Goodnight, shoulders. (pause) Scrunch your whole face like you ate a lemon... and let it go smooth. Goodnight, face. (pause) Your whole body is soft and heavy now, like a sandbag on the beach."

Part 3 - The quiet place (about 3 minutes)

"Now picture a place where you feel completely safe and cozy. Maybe it's real, maybe it's made up. (pause) Look around your place... what colors do you see? (pause - they answer silently, in their head) Listen... what soft sounds are there? (pause) Feel how warm and safe it is. Nothing to do there. Nowhere to be. (pause) Your quiet place stays with you all night - you can go back to it in your dreams. (pause) I love you. I'm nearby. Your only job now is resting."

Then stop talking

End it there - even if they're not asleep yet. Resist the encore. Lingering doubles the script's length within a week; a consistent, boring ending is what teaches the body that this is really the end of the day.

For anxious bedtimes: if worries surface mid-script, don't debate them at 8:45pm. "That worry can go in tomorrow's worry time - right now we're doing goodnight-toes." Then continue. The Worry Workbook in the resource library is the daytime home for those worries.