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# PARENTING

by Dawnn Whittaker

## The move to freedom

.. the transition from a crib to a bed

**T**he move from a crib to a “big bed” will bring a sense of freedom to your child and a new set of challenges for you. It’s not always a case of your child being ready for the transition – are you ready?

Before making any quick drastic changes, draw up a plan. It always helps to think about what your strategies will be so that you can stay one step ahead and be consistent in your actions.

As children develop, you get windows of opportunity to help them make a transition. Making the changes too early or too late will result in different sets of issues. The age spectrum of when children are ready varies between 18 months and three years. However, all children are different and only you can determine when your child is ready for the move to a bed.

Here are a few of the signs:

- The crib has become dangerous. As soon as you start to question your child’s safety or your child demonstrates an ability to scale the bars of his crib, it’s

definitely time to make the move.

- The crib becomes too small. It’s time if your child cannot get comfortable in his crib and is unable to settle at bedtime or he bangs into the side rails, causing him to wake up during the night.

- Your child shows interest in a big bed. His sibling or friend gets a new bed and he expresses curiosity about it or starts to show negativity towards his crib.

- Don’t move your child to a bed to make room for a new baby, when moving to a new home, when changing or starting daycare or when anticipating other major life changes. Don’t take on too much by combining potty training or learning another important skill during this time.

Before you start, think about how your child normally handles change. Your analysis will prepare you for your child’s reaction. Anticipate that bedtime initially will become a game.

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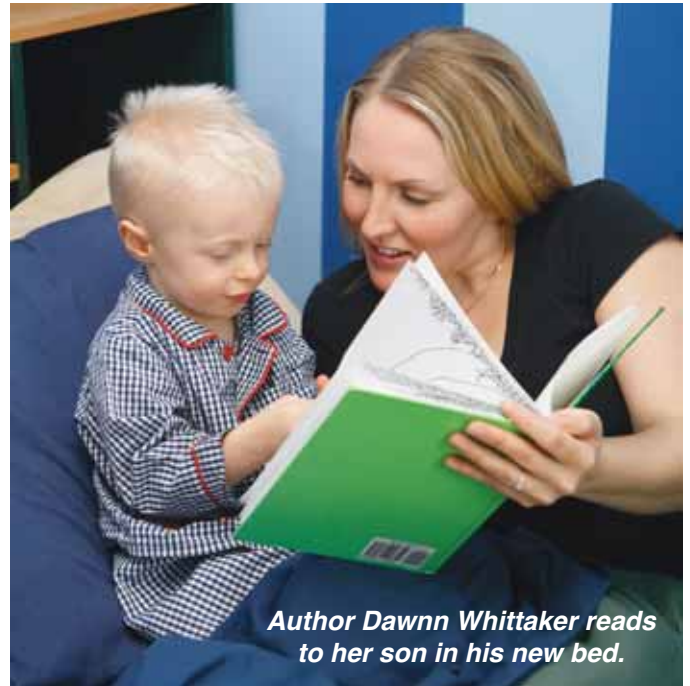


## Be positive and let your child know frequently how amazing his new skill is.

### Tips for a smooth transition:

- Get your child involved. Let him look and try out different beds and choose bed linen with his favourite characters or colours.
- Create a positive feeling around the new bed. Let your child nap in it, read books together in it and relax and cuddle on it.
- Remove accidents waiting to happen. Move toys with wheels, stools, chairs and any other climbable objects. Make sure that major light switches cannot be reached by the child and check that all electrical outlets are covered.
- Make your child comfortable before you leave the room. When you take your child to the new bed, sit on the bed for a few minutes and reinforce how wonderful it is that you can sit with your child on his bed. Read a book, talk about all the fun things you did during the day and all the things that you are going to do tomorrow.
- Set rules and boundaries. Tell them, in a firm but loving way, that it's not okay to get out of bed (unless it's for a trip to the potty, which you can keep in their room), and let your child know that in the morning he can get out of his bed and come to you for a big morning snuggle. Once you have said goodnight and left the room, switch to nighttime mode. If he gets out, take him right back to bed and minimize eye contact and communication.
- Dedicate some time each night for a week or two to help get your child started. At first, don't give your child the opportunity to get out of bed – keep poking your head back in to make sure he is okay and emphasize you will be back in a minute to check on him.

- Be prepared for hunger, thirst and “My tummy hurts!” calls. Meet all of your child's needs before they retire for the night and leave a little cup of water by their bed. The chance of an illness suddenly arising at bedtime is unlikely, and complaints of stomach ache and various pains are just a few of the common excuses a child will use as a bedtime delay tactic. If you respond to these once, they may well become nightly rituals.



*Author Dawnn Whittaker reads to her son in his new bed.*

In some cases you might have to go back a step in order to go forwards by implementing some form of gradual withdrawal. You might also want to introduce a clock/alarm or other cue that lets your child know when morning has arrived so that he can come to you for his cuddle.

Be positive and let your child know frequently how amazing his new skill is.

### Tips for troubleshooting difficult transitions

- Lights out! Darkness triggers the sleep hormone melatonin. A child will not be able to get to sleep if there is too much light seeping into the room so invest in black-out blinds if you can. A small nightlight is sufficient if your child is scared of the dark.
- Choose a sensible bedtime that is appropriate for your child's age. Between 7:00 and 8:00 pm is good. Any later and your child will be catching a second wind, which will make winding down difficult.

Give your child warnings or reminders so they know what you expect of them: “Five minutes until bedtime, two minutes until bedtime, etc.” Then follow through! Giving them regular notice will prepare them for what is coming next. **MP**

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