

Sleep Solutions for Tired Families: Expert Advice

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SUMMARY

In this episode of the Connected Families podcast, host Stacy Bart and guest Christina Spaith, an occupational therapist specializing in sleep, discuss the challenges parents face regarding their children's sleep patterns. They share insights on how to improve sleep for children and the importance of parental self-care in managing sleep issues.

- *Christina's journey into sleep specialization began with her own struggles as a parent of three children with sleep difficulties.*
- *Common sleep issues include infants not transitioning to sleep independently, toddlers resisting bedtime, and older children struggling with sleep due to school and social pressures.*
- *Parents often seek help only after reaching a crisis point of sleep deprivation.*
- *Establishing a daily routine that includes physical activity, connection, and quiet time can significantly improve children's sleep.*
- *The importance of a calming bedtime routine, which can include prayer, reading, and creating a soothing environment, is emphasized.*
- *Parents are encouraged to communicate love and security to their children, which can alleviate anxiety around sleep.*
- *The podcast highlights the role of pets in family sleep dynamics and suggests incorporating sensory activities to promote relaxation.*
- *Spiritual self-care and leaning into God's love are presented as vital components for parents managing sleep challenges.*

[Music] hi friends welcome back I'm Stacy Bart the host of the connected families podcast Welcome to our community we are people committed to pursuing God's grace and truth for ourselves and then daily working to pass that Grace and Truth onto our children I'm so glad that you are here hey quick question how have you been sleeping at night have you wondered how much sleep your child should get at night I sure did different seasons do

you have sleep issues in your house well on today's episode Lynn Jackson co-founder of connected families has an insightful and resourceful conversation with Christina spaith she's an occupational therapist that specializes in family sleep dysregulation sensory and attention issues and family Dynamics let's listen in on Lynn and Christina's just excellent conversation I'm excited today to welcome Christina spart and

you're an occupational therapist that specializes in sleep so I love talking to another OT and um particularly about sleep what a great topic that really challenges parents so give us the snapshot of how this came to be such a

focus area for you yeah I had been an occupational therapist that specialized in Pediatrics for several years and I worked in clinic and schools I thought I was set up quite well to have children

of my own I thought I'd read all the books and my first son was born and he hadn't read any of the books he defied all of what I had prepared myself for so that really took me on a journey because he would not sleep during the day more than 15 minutes at a time maybe 45 and especially at night he did not either so we struggled for months seeking different doctors and Specialists so that was my first child that led me to

specialize in sleep we went on to have two other children that also had their own Journey so I didn't learn it all with one child so the Lord kept offering me more opportunities to learn and as I know your story it was quite a faith-building journey as well that God really did use in your home so give us a quick snapshot of where you are now with three sons 1916 and 13 and how has sleep transformed over the years

yeah when I didn't understand what was going on at the time I thought maybe the Lord was using my Journeys and difficulty with sleep with my children for me to help others I think that is a big part but it was more about that I really relied on the Lord it really developed a deep prayer life in me and uh that was something that I didn't get until a little bit later that I understood that all of my children sleep

on their own now one off at college and doesn't want to come home so he's doing just fine we still have a different negotiation if you would a different Journey with sleep with a 16 and a 13y old that's awesome Yep sleep was an issue in our house particularly when the kids were old enough to get kind of spicy and independent and they would be like three little monkeys just jumping all over each other and um yeah the

story about that's in our book but problem solving as a team how we could make bedtime time the sort of the dessert of connection on our day really turned the corner for us so that was part of my spiritual journey as well learning to not try to just manage them and her them into their slots and Bully them into staying there but problem solving it together as a family so that we could really connect well at the end

of the day so that's my kind of story of how the Lord used sleep challenges in our lives in my life and particular so what are some common sleep issues that you address with your ped's OT experience a lot of the young parents with infants come to me because they're trying to just get their infant to transition to sleeping out of their arms or maybe they could fall asleep feeding but what happens when they lay them down

that might be a common one how to get them to sleep longer chunks of sleep rather than you know like I was mentioning with my son 15 minutes or 45 then in toddler age kind of what you mentioned they get to the monkey phase what happens when and you want to switch them from a crib to a bed and how do you get them to fall asleep without you attached to them or holding their hand or holding your

hair so that would be more in the Toddlers and what about when they wake up and come out at 3: in the morning and where are they and I'm play older phase then it's navigating what we are having in school and

sports and friends so sleepovers and how much sleep you know kids need versus because they're getting not enough and it's affecting their performance in school and their health so those are the challenges as you get to 12 to teenagers

right yeah yeah I've read some of the research about sleep and grades and school Success and it's really astounding of the best things kids can do to just improve their academic function so yeah and then you know why do parents finally come across that Buri to say I need help yes I think a lot of times the parents don't know where to look one I think they wait till they are not

sleeping themselves until they really need help and then it might be a little bit of a crisis situation you know they're they're really sleep deprived so I think those are the kind of things maybe there's other the things that they've been trying just don't seem to work they keep thinking the kids's going to get older and things will get easier and it still is a challenge so I would say those are some of the reasons they

finally trip into coming to find help yep how do you start I know you talked about helping parents understand how much sleep their kids should be getting we have that information in a sleepy book and you you consulted with me on that as I wrote that have a a graph in there of all the the Sleep recommendations but let's just do toddlers and ages 3 to five because those are kind of hot button ages how much sleep should kids be getting in

that range it's a little tricky at age three because depending on if they're home or at a daycare or at a preschool program they might have rest time or nap time some three-year-olds are wired differently and they end up dropping naps by that time but if possible they should still be napping or allowing rest time so depending on if they actually take a nap it changes the amount of sleep at night but in general ages 3 to

five I would say between 10 to 12 hours asleep and I always air on the not the conservative side the generous side so more towards 12 all righty you know we're going to be diving into some just some of the Practical suggestions you make for families on impr improving sleep but it you know at Connected families we have this framework that all starts with Foundation what's going on with me and the parent and so before a

break we're going to address that what can parents do for themselves when they're struggling with sleep to get enough sleep themselves and just this whole issue seems overwhelming yes I think that's a great place to start I think that when it's young children they they feel a sense of urgency and maybe they don't know how to help themselves especially if they have a full-time job but if you're have a family with two so a mom and a dad then what I suggest is

really working with each other to set up a schedule so that you're getting more sleep as an adult build in naps and that would be before 400 p.m. or so so that it doesn't affect the nighttime sleep they have a nap that then maybe they can't sleep at night but when you're in a situation where you're really sleep deprived that those stress hormones just bu build up and actually make it harder to fall asleep you don't have good

quality of sleep so I actually suggest if you can even arrest for the adult 15 minutes to 45 where their sensory nervous system is just quiet even if they don't fall asleep that's one of the first things I I have you know them build in and then of course asking for help reach out to your friend Network to your church Network to your family Network especially when you're in a in a place where you're really not sleeping

and and just a allow yourself to if you need to go away for a couple days you know get your body back into a rhythm where it's sleeping because then Clarity will come too with a lot of other things that you need to put in place right and I've read some of that research on what happens when we don't sleep enough and it actually changes how we perceive facial expressions it's like the world is against us if we are sleep deprived

very difficult to come to a stressed out anxious child who is like separated from you when you're in that state yourself and you inadvertently give kind of facial messages of I just want to be done with you for now you know which increases the child's anxiety so these those are great suggestions of getting you know the support that you need to get some sleep and then just viewing this differently like you and I shared

our story it's not just about go how do I get this kid to sleep but what is the Lord wanting me to experience in this challenge how can I lean into him viewing this as an opportunity to grow spiritually relationally as a parent and just learn of his goodness towards my family spiritual self-care as well can be really important yes so you have a a favorite verse about this and then a good quote that I think might

yes yes St Augustine's my quote my heart is restless until I rest in you oh Lord that's that's one that is near and dear to me and then I have uh behind me in my room here so that I can see it every time I lay down and go to bed or wake up be still and know that I am God and so yes how how do we still our our hearts and our bodies and our minds and our

Spirits you had mentioned uh spiritual help and and hearing with the Lord wants of you in those times I I think one of the things I could have done a little better during the chaos time of not getting enough sleep I did my prayer time but I I wasn't still enough I didn't maybe go for walks and try to hear what the Lord was speaking to me at that time it's hard when you're you know you're sleep deprived but that's

what I would have done differently at that time I would have taken a little bit more quiet time to to listen if I could yeah good thoughts well we're going to take a quick break and when we come back we're going to dive into all the Practical things that you can do to help your kiddo hi friends Stacy here the team at Connected families did it again and put together a quick but big impact downloadable resource that you will want

to have as you move into December you know the kids have already been thinking about Christmas gifts and putting their list together and maybe you've already been thinking about what you want to give them or passing their list on to family members well I have a question what if you gave your kids the gift of quick yet meaningful connection during the Christmas season we created a brand new resource that we're calling the connected Christmas bundle it includes

some really great things here's a few of them connected Advent calendar it's 25 quick ideas for connection there's also a fill-in-the blank affirmation cards which you could use as stocking stuffers or even gift tags there's lots of ways to use them and also 15 ideas for calming fun at crazy family gatherings that's such a long title I think they're going to shorten it but it's just calming ideas when things get crazy and

maybe the house is full you know the bundle is packed with ideas to connect with your children during Advent I think you're going to want to use this resource year year after year now we get it December is often so busy and crazy with to-do lists and so many fun events we worked really hard to make these ideas quick and easy for you parents Mom and Dad I'm actually even wondering though if your kids would want to grab

some of the ideas to connect with you or their siblings you never know but the big idea is that intentionally connecting is an incredibly meaningful gift that we can give others I would suggest hey getting the Christmas bundle before December so that you can get started and it's yours with a financial gift of \$35 just \$35 contributes to the production of the many free resources that we make available all year round

and your gift of \$35 or more is needed at this time so there's two ways to give and receive the connected Christmas bundle first tap through to the show notes to give your financial gift online or the second way is by text you can text the word parenting to 50155 and you will receive the bundle as part of your receipt you know when January comes think of the beautiful memories you and your children will have

of sweet connection that's not just about the Christmas gifts so tap through the show notes to give your gift of \$35 or more to receive the Christmas bundle with the 25 days of connection and the crazy fun calming ideas all the things they're they're going to be there give your gift today we want to send you the bundle so that you can build sweet memories of connection this Christmas

season all right so we are diving now into all the practical stuff what can you do during the day to set up a child for a good night's rest take us there Christina okay well this was a New Concept for me I didn't think of that before I thought okay we're at bedtime I'd heard of bedtime routines maybe give them a bath give them massage all these these things you could do but to do things right away when they wake up that

would get them ready for sleep at night so that was new for me and um there's you know a part in your foundation's framework that connection piece I thought I always had to do that at night this is when I you know read their books this is when I say the prayers the connection is there well they want connection for another five hours and so I thought okay this connection piece and it and it's actually now bringing me

into my teenage years with my kids happens a lot outside of the bedtime routine and so that changed my perspective and I think also filled up the bucket for my kids Hearts oh for sure I remember coaching a parent who they had just moved and when they moved to their new house the one child stopped napping and then he would scream and keep the others from napping I said just have so much fun with him and let your

face show your Delight in him and just play with him you know and during the day leading up to nap time and and rekindle that Joy for your son and it was like he went down for his nap that day and she emailed me weeks later and said and he's still napping well it was just this delight and this sense of okay in this new house mommy still loves me and still enjoys me because that is the

best antidote to the anxiety that makes it's so difficult for kids to separate from their parents and go to sleep if they're questioning if they're loved then that feeds an anxiety that just naturally in their self- protection says I can't separate because I just am not sure that I'm loved yeah there's other activities then because I'm a pediatric occupational therapist I also specialize in sensory therapy what which would be

just how our senses are involved in setting us up for for sleep and so I thank the Lord that he gave me a love for water so long ago so I actually started my business doing therapy in the water about 30 years ago and so I found that if you can do a swimming with your child and not like swimming lessons and you put them in swimming lessons you get in the water with them because then it's

the touch skin on skin they have all of their nerves exposed they usually get hungry and then they sleep well you can also do it at your own home finger paint in the shower you know in the bathtub so and make so instead of leaving bath to the end of the day which actually I think for sensitive kids heightens their arousal and their alertness we put it in the morning when it's just a beautiful loving Connection in playtime um

stickers in the tub you know you can think of all the fun things and so that's one activity that I suggest those one of the first things I suggest yeah that's great and I know in general you know if you get kids outside in the morning to for some vigorous that'll help with their circadian rhythms and melatonin and all that stuff when I coach parents about sleep I'll talk about sort of big muscle activity during the day to keep those cortisol levels

down and then gradually in the evening you don't start with wild and crazy play you start with some big motor stuff that's structured like maybe an obstacle course or some families ride bikes right after dinner great repetitive motion togetherness that kind of thing and that can really help sleep and then you sort of dial it down from there so any other thoughts about setting up a child for a good night's rest with things that you

do during the day or should we dive into the night time routine so I would recommend that they would take a rest time either with or without music and lights may be lights out and then also they could read a book or do puzzles and that would that quiet time after lunch was a really important time to reset uh and just get their nervous system you know calmed down and and ready for the next phase of the day great suggestion

and I know that our arousal state in general starts out low of course as we wake up and then it gets high and then it dips a little after lunch and then it comes back up partway and then down again so you're you're structuring in that natural circadian rhythm dip by having downtime after lunch great suggestion here's a fun one in your in your notes you've got something about pet care I funny story about that but I

think it's very different about what you were going to say about pet care and how it affects family sleep yes I was surprised that families were coming to me I I didn't ask about it enough until one person started talking to me about their family structure it was an adult and that made me start asking about pets because lots of people have dogs I think in my neighbor Hood we have as many dogs as we have kids in the neighborhood and

so and my family alone we have two so we have almost as many dogs as kids sometimes in the house and uh the dogs sleep with you or jump off and on the bed and you know our dogs have a good regimen during the day to have good night sleep at night so I do address pet care and just how are the pets affecting where are they sleeping do they sleep in the kids' rooms do they

go in and out of the rooms at night are are they sleeping with the parents and just making sure that the dogs get lots of exercise some some families that work and both our Working Families have their days where they take their pets to the pet daycare and they get to run around and and get their fill so the dogs need their own little connection time with activity and with their owners right so that they don't start barking and waking

everybody up when everyone is trying to sleep yeah that sometimes pets can just be magic certain pets can just be magic particularly like a cat that just wants to lay next to the child so probably the funniest experience I've had coaching was coaching parents who their son was really struggling to sleep and I talked about a lava lamp you know or maybe just a little fish in a in a fish bowl that he could look at something of Interest

as they put him down to to just sort of give him a visual Focus that was calming yeah transitional object yeah yep and they said oh I bet he'd really like a fish and I said oh we just got given a fish and now we're going to be going on you know we're traveling for a little bit would you like to fish sit oh my goodness for us and our house was just like half a mile from the coaching

office and so they followed me over I gave them Freddy the fish and the fish food and the fish bowl and I said you know if this doesn't work out you return it at your next coaching session I never saw Freddy again because fredie just what that little guy needed to just feel like I have something interesting to watch and I got just a little bit of company and I never had to worry about Freddy barking and

waking guy that's just a fun tip a lava lamp or if you're bold try a a fish with enough of a light behind the thing that the Fishbowl that your child can see let's finish by talking about what you can do in that bedtime routine that nighttime routine and expectations I think that the family needs to kind of look at and they can refer to the ebook again of how much sleep the child needs because when do they need to wake up in

the morning that's really important and then go back from there to figure out okay what does that mean that my time what time do we need to be falling asleep and allow the child and another hour before that so working that out when are we picking the kids up from school when are they getting home when are we coming home how do we set up maybe a crock pot to to have the meal ready so it's not another hour before we

eat so it's kind of just taking a look and making a little bit of plan during the day and then your schedule to plan for sleep instead of leaving it last plan for your sleep and then set that up so after you've done that planning and you've eaten your meal then after that what I what I'd say especially for kids that have that trouble transitioning is just say we're going to give this next hour you know

this next four all of the routines I mentioned before I move bath or shower you don't have to bathe your kid every single day you know and so that's another thing to you know you don't need to put bathing into the nighttime routine if it is one more challenge of the night if they're running around and they're jumping around and they're throwing soap around you know move it for a little bit do it on the weekend and then do like a

puzzle time or or something that you know is in their room little books on tape is what I used to do and now they have audio books or dim the lights like you said the lava lamp they have now all these LEDs where you can turn it to the nighttime lights and and set up the room the room should be a little cooler so it shouldn't be really hot you had mentioned the Circadian rhythm with getting outside in the morning making

sure that we dim our lights in the house house early as we're getting ready for bed using the natural cues for our body to be able to sleep yeah we have some some friends that they turn on the red lights red light bulbs at night and the white light bulbs are off and that just helps to to bring everybody down because it blocks it eliminates that that blue light and certainly eliminating screen time before bed is really really

important and talking with your your older kids who might be tempted to sneak you know access to screens just what that does to their body what that does to their social relationships and their academics when they don't get enough sleep so really helping the older kids to understand the value of sleep and there's there's a book out can't remember the author's last name but it's Matthew and it's why we sleep and there's just fascinating research in

that book so helping kids at an age appropriate level understand that so then you can kind of brainstorm what'll set us up for the best sleep and that's kind of what I what I did with our kids as well in the Sleepy book we kind of talk about body soul mind Spirit how you prepare all those things for prepare your child in all those areas for sleep and do you have any thoughts on preparing kids kind of emotionally and

spiritually we kind of talked about physically but emotionally and spiritually to sleep oh that's really nice I think again it doesn't have to be just in the moment but I know obviously a beautiful routine of of nighttime can be that prayer and the prayer can be through a talks the prayer can be actual words of invoking God of a nighttime routine now I lay me down to sleep you know a routine of a specific prayer it

can be a song it could be using your little animal an my four-year-old wanted to know how to hear God and I said because he said I don't hear God and I and I said well I feel I do and I said I can teach you and we just use as little animals and he would talk to God and I would use the animals and talk back so I think that's a way you can use it in the

nighttime routine but also the youth groups that they have and the different formations that we have at at our Parish at our local church um and then that extends now into our community of our neighborhood just to talk about that at our meals and when we're playing at the park so it it becomes you know just a part of their life a part of what they live yeah that's awesome and I talked some in the the Sleep e book about just

creating images of God's beautiful creation that the kids love and talking about those and their favorite spaces and one gal when she was really stressed her mom just took her they lived uh on the west coast and she just took her to the the the ocean beach and they just sat there and and the girl calmed down and they just talked about God's presence there and then at other times you know like at bedtime the girl was

able to reflect back on that beauty or maybe you have a picture of their favorite place that they can think about and how it reminds them of God and just in a calming way I guess another thought that I would throw into this is is just leaning into God's love for you so that you you can look into the eyes of your child and communicate Delight even when they're struggling that's one of the hardest things but that's when the Holy

Spirit can just come and encourage us and strengthen us with I see you my beloved child as you're parenting this this struggling kiddo and I love you and let's overflow that love into your child we both of course call on God the Father just to love through us and let us be Christ in us so that we can show God's love and mercy because we are the first ones we're the first ones that have to

to be that person to be that light for the child so that's that's what we try to do also all right well I think I'll just close with a prayer of blessing over these families because this is a really really tough issue I want parents to to feel seen and heard about this that this can just be overwhelming discouraging exhausting all the things so I'm just going to close us out with a prayer of blessing father I just pray your

abundant blessing on these parents that the Holy Spirit would bring the love of Jesus into these difficult moments and that that parents could just sense your love your your strength your power for them in these times and they would see see these these moments as opportunities to end their day with their child just feeling so loved by them and by you so in the hard hard

times I pray that you would strengthen them in a powerful way to communicate that love and we ask this confidently in Jesus' name amen amen well Christina a delight to have you with us your contact information will be in the show notes so parents wanting to connect with you for help with sleep can do so and um we're just grateful that you joined us today thanks so much thank you I'm very grateful to Connected families too

thanks for tuning in today friends we are a listener supported organization would you give a financial gift today when you give a gift of \$35 or more we will send you the newly created connection Christmas bundle it will give you so many ideas for quick connection this Advent season tap through the show notes to give your donation today individual donations make the work to equip and encourage families possible

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