

No Set Bedtime with Gila and Katherine

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SUMMARY

The podcast episode features a discussion about implementing a no set bedtime routine with two parents, Gila and Catherine, who are exploring this approach for their children. The host shares insights on how this method can help meet both children's and parents' needs, emphasizing the importance of flexibility, communication, and understanding individual needs.

- Gila, a psychologist and single mother, seeks to improve her son's sleep habits and reduce bedtime power struggles.*
- Catherine, a mother from Maryland, is interested in the no set bedtime approach to regain personal time with her husband, as their current routine leads to late bedtimes.*
- The host explains that resistance from children often indicates that current routines are not working and that flexibility can lead to better outcomes.*
- Establishing a no set bedtime allows children to self-regulate their sleep patterns, potentially leading to earlier bedtimes as they learn to listen to their bodies.*
- Parents are encouraged to identify their own needs and set boundaries that allow for personal time while still meeting their child's needs for connection.*
- The discussion highlights the importance of communication between parents and children about bedtime routines and the potential for negotiation.*
- The podcast emphasizes that cultural norms around sleep and bedtime can influence parenting choices, and it's essential to find what works best for each family.*
- The host invites listeners to reflect on their own needs and the dynamics within their families to create a bedtime routine that fosters cooperation and understanding.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting mojo podcast today we're actually going to do something that we have not done before we have two parents here with us today and they reached out to me after the it was still recent to us as we're recording here that's going to be a little while before this episode is released and the episode with dr chris winter where we were learning about sleep and we talked

about our no set bedtime process and at the beginning of that interview i said if anyone's curious about this and is interested in applying this idea with their own children feel free to reach out and maybe we can set something up and so we have two fabulous parents here today gila and catherine and they each of them reached out and we're curious about various aspects and we're also kind of hesitant about various aspects and so today we're going to talk through

with them what it might look like to have a no set bedtime routine in their house so i'm going to ask each of

them to introduce themselves and then i'm going to talk for a bit about how this is played out for us and for what i've seen with the families that have implemented it and then we're going to go into a q a and they're going to poke holes in this on your behalf dear listeners so that you can really

see how this is how this could play out with your family if you decided to try this so hello and welcome to gila and katherine gila did you want to go first and introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you and your family where you are in the world and and what made you reach out when you when you saw this offer there yeah thanks for having me um so i am a single mom of a seven-year-old boy

uh we're in upstate new york and i reached out um for a couple of reasons one is that my son while sometimes he falls asleep relatively easily sometimes relatively frequently he falls asleep more than an hour after lights out and i'm a little familiar with the insomnia literature and my understanding is that it's not good to be in bed for that long and tossing and turning and i want to establish healthy sleep habits but i

also really think this is so important um the other piece is that sleep is a time when behavioral challenges can come up and i think there's a lot of reasons why that's the case but one of them is the power dynamic that this is a place where there can be a power struggle and i've seen in other places how better things go when i can shift away from the sort of power over dynamic and have a more collaborative um approach

but i struggle with that with bedtime because i do think that sleep is so important and because it's a place where i think structure and consistency are helpful so um but i was very intrigued and i'm very curious to learn more okay super and my understanding is you have more than a passing professional interest in this topic is that right um yeah so i am a psychologist and a neuropsychologist and so i recommend my patients all the time to improve sleep

habits which is just so critical for cognitive functioning emotional functioning psychological and physical um so okay cool well thank you very much for uh telling us about you catherine um who are you where are you in the world who's your family yes i'm katherine um based in southern maryland just outside of dc um i have one daughter who's about three years and three months now um so

we our bedtime routines have been a little bit inconsistent um over time and lately at one point we had gotten it to a pretty good um timing where she was usually uh in bed and we left the room by 8 30 and now it's kind of crept up to 9 30 by the time we leave and that leaves very little time for my husband and i to spend time together or just relax

so i was i think that the nurse at bedtime approach would be exciting to her um could potentially be really helpful for us but i am hesitant about or i can see um potential challenges with getting her to actually stay in her room while we go do something else we usually like to just watch a tv show together or you know spend time together and i i

could see her begging to leave her women and spend time with us okay so also like gila um feeling pretty excited about the possibility of this and also like how on earth is that actually going to work in real life with my real child is that right yes yeah okay okay so let me tell you how we put this in place for us um and then we can answer all of your questions on behalf of all

the parents who are listening to this so um i will say that i i'm not sure that everybody who's listening to this necessarily needs to to try this approach or to use this approach um i think that one of the main indicators that we can use to say should we try this approach is maybe something about bedtime is not working for us right now either it's not working for the child and we'll know it's not working for the child because

we see them resisting we see them stalling we see them not wanting to go to bed um or something isn't working for us and catherine i think you're a great example of that where um where you're not necessarily uh sort of that you're seeing the stalling and eventually the child's getting into bed and then you get your your downtime it's like your downtime has kind of evaporated at this point and so uh so something about that is not

working for you and so if the way that we're doing things right now is not working for one or both parties involved then i think that's a really good reason to consider doing something differently so um so we introduced this when my daughter was about two and a half which uh even dr winter was pretty shocked where he heard that how young she was and basically it came about through uh resistance to bedtime and thinking

why are we doing this why are we doing this every night this is harder than it needs to be what can we shift that can make this potentially easier so uh our routine definitely shifts a little bit with uh how light it is outside and i has also shifted as she's gotten older as well but in general what we end up doing is dinner is at around 6 45 and i've i've cooked every other night usually i cook one night and then

we have leftovers reheated the second night and and dinner itself takes about 20 minutes so um so we're coming into the period just after seven o'clock and then we have a good deal of flex time in that hour that almost hour until about eight i keep a learning journal for her and i try and keep that out on the end of the dining room table and so that's my my period of the day to write in there she

takes a bath every other day sometimes she wants to have play time if something interesting came in the mail or um we're just back from a trip where we've been exploring national parks and she didn't finish some of her junior ranger badges and she wants to finish those and so so that's sort of a good deal of flex time in that almost hour um and then at eight o'clock we i have we used to have brushing teeth right at

eight o'clock and we've sort of flexed that a little bit as she's gotten older to have stories first and then she brushes teeth after if your child has strong resistance to brushing teeth i would definitely advise having brushing teeth before stories um so that you can sort of use that as a light touch logical consequence if you're having trouble getting the teeth brushed that we might not have time for stories if we don't get the teeth

brushed in an expedient manner we're at a point now where that's not so much of a challenge as it has been in previous years and so we we can allow a little more flexibility there so so but at eight o'clock we're starting our story time and uh karis actually sleeps on a pile of blankets on the floor in her bedroom by her choice [Laughter] it's certainly not our preference and so that does mean that her bedroom is not a

very comfortable place to read stories if you're if your child is sleeping in a bed like most children do and bed that is a comfortable place then you could certainly read stories in your bedroom and many parents find that the fewer transitions that they have around bedtime the better and so that's one more reason to get the teeth done early so you don't have to come out of the bedroom again if that is potentially a challenge uh for us again

that's not so much of an issue so we have stories um in the living room and then after that uh we're transitioning to this mythical time that you're all wondering about what actually happens in this time and so our basic parameter is you can do whatever you like it needs to be mostly in your room and we took a harder line on this when she was younger and i am not going to be involved in this so

if you need help with stickers or glue or tape or anything like that that is not a project that we're going to be doing during this period after story time that it needs to be something that you can do without asking for my help and so in the early days with a younger child what you will probably find is that if you just set up the options of you can go to bed even if you're not

tired or you can play in your room quietly by yourself you will probably find the child will be quite attracted to this idea of not lying in bed which they may have been forced to do for some period of time before that um i think the key idea that a lot of parents are struggling with here is that that this this period of time has to meet both parties needs and really everything that we're doing in our

interactions with our children ideally is going to be meeting both of their needs and the important part to distinguish there is the difference between needs and strategies and so uh and a strategy is a way that we can meet a need so i might have a need for let's say um actually let's look at it from the other way i might think to myself well i want to read a book every night that that's part of how i want to spend my time and

i and i need to read a book i need i need that for myself actually that reading that book is a strategy to meet a need which could be depending on what kind of book it is it could be intellectual stimulation it could be relaxation it could be self-care time it could be any one of a number of needs that i'm meeting by reading this book and when we bring this back to the level of needs rather than strategies we can

see actually there might be a whole bunch of other ways to get those needs met so if my need for that time is for intellectual stimulation i might be able to listen to a podcast just as easily as i can listen as i can read a book um if my need is for self-care maybe a bath in the bathroom with the door locked [Laughter] would be another way to have that need met um and that that doesn't involve

anything to do with books necessarily so if we can see this at a level of needs then all of a sudden a whole bunch of different ways of meeting that potential need can be met and so we're always looking to understand what is my real need here not the strategy i'm using to try and meet that need and what is the child's real need here maybe the child is not tired and that's why they're not wanting to go to bed maybe

they don't feel as though they've had enough connection time with you in the day and that's why they don't want to go to bed and we need to understand what is their needs so that we can help them to address that because if their need is for connection time with you then when eight o'clock or whatever is your time or you know 8 30 once you get to the story end of story time rolls around they're probably still going to be

coming out of their rooms saying i want to spend time with you because they're not feeling as though they've had that connection time with you so if you're seeing behavior that is difficult for you to navigate and like coming out of the room when when you're hoping that they're going to be spending this time in their room then you always want to be asking yourself what need is the child trying to fulfill by by doing this behavior and so if it's

connection time well what can we do about that maybe uh you could have connection time with them earlier in the day and so their cup is full by bedtime and thus they don't mind the separation from you as much um if you don't have time to do that earlier in the day maybe an hour and a half of kind of irritated you know i told you to stay in your room i told you to stay in your room is not meeting your

need for relaxation and self-care at the end of the day and perhaps 30 minutes of one-on-one time with your child could refill their cup their need for connection and also then get you an hour of time on the back end for your self-care time your connection time with your partner and so on so and so i think that that is that's really at the crux of the well what do i do if my child doesn't stay in their

bedroom idea um on on the younger end when they're not necessarily as able to communicate their needs uh then then the you know do you want to be in bed or do you want to play in your room quietly by yourself can be useful but as soon as they're old enough to start expressing what's actually going on for them then we can start to bring in this idea of needs and meeting theirs and meeting ours as well and in the meantime we can

always hypothesize we can always sort of take an educated guess at what we think is going on for them and try to help them meet their need to the best that we can understand it so um so that's a super important uh important piece and um then of course you get to well what happens if they go to bed late and when we first started this yes i will say there was a period of maybe a week it was probably two weeks at the

most where uh we were we had gone from sort of an 8 30 lights out too it was heading towards 9 30 and 10. and at that point we we had been doing uh we had been making up songs or stories you know i would lie with her for a little bit and make up a song or a story um based on some funny thing that happened in the day or she would suggest a character and i would make up a song

or a story based on that and so of course it gets to 9 30 or 10 and she's like okay it's song time now and i'm like it's not song time it's ten o'clock at night it is not time for making up songs and stories and so i put a boundary in place to say after nine o'clock i do not have the mental capacity to be able to make up songs and stories so if you choose to go

to bed before nine o'clock then i will be able to read you or to tell you a song make up a story um if you go if you choose to go to bed after that then i'm not going to be able to do that i don't have the mental capacity to do that and so there was then a period of time where she chose to go to bed at nine o'clock so she could get her song or her story

there were other days where she's like i don't really care that much i'd rather keep doing what i'm doing it doesn't matter to me and so yeah there there will be a period of time where they're learning what it is like to self-regulate and they may end up tired and if you were to start this on a monday and they were you know they're in preschool and they were to spend those days in school would that be the end of the world if

you were not the person who had to deal with that my hypothesis my the way i approached it was no it would not be the end of the world if i was not the person who had to deal with that so yes we very deliberately did this on school days and yeah you're that means you're going to get woken up at a certain time and i'm going to be super upfront about that i'm going to say we need to be out the

door at 8 15 and it takes you a bit of time to get going i'm thinking 7 30 is a reasonable time we're simplifying our morning routine as much as we can so things like getting dressed brushing teeth um and eating breakfast those were really the only three things we were doing in the morning at that time um and at 7 30 rolls around and waking her up she's pretty tired she's not super happy to be woken up

but within a couple of weeks she had learned that if you go to bed at 10 you are probably going to wake up very tired and the day is probably going to be kind of rough and there may be a period of time where you have to sort of say hey it's it's 9 30 are you sure you want to stay up and you can see they're still kind of they're still in in whatever they're doing and they don't want to stop it's

like okay i'm waking you up at 7 30 no matter what and then pretty soon you get to a point where the the luster of staying up until whatever time i like wears off a little bit and they don't feel as though this is something you're going to take away and thus they have to do it to the max in case my parent changes their mind and won't let me do this anymore they realize this is a long-term thing and so

all of a sudden staying up until super late becomes something that's it's it's not a big deal and i will say for probably a year now uh right after story time on most nights carys has been going to bed at 8 30. um and so [Laughter] we're kind of where i might want to be if i was forcing her to go to bed at a certain time but without the forcing it's just coming from her desire

her fatigue her knowledge of her own body and knowing what's coming up the next day and things that she's excited for and what she wants to be up for at a certain time to do before school and and so it just flows it's just she is regulating her own energy and uh and her own sleep cycles so that she gets her needs met and so as we sort of wrap up here what we what we find is that when a child is

able to do that the stalling goes away there's no reason to stall because you know that you can stay up for as long as you like so any struggles you've had with the child saying i don't want to do this and i'm not tired and or just not even verbally saying anything but just resisting every single step of this process just goes away because their needs are being met and also your needs are being met as

well and so uh nobody is exerting top-down control over this process but we have two people or more than two people who also need to agree on this approach potentially um who are in this relationship who are both having their needs met and that is a beautiful thing so um so thus endeth the lecture on how no set bedtime went for us and is currently going for us and now aguila and catherine i am guessing that a whole bunch of

questions are buzzing through your minds let's uh have a conversation about um things that you're still curious about things that you're really worried about and and also what might you want to jump in and try first thank you for sharing that uh that is beautiful and inspirational that she has come to this place where she's actually self-regulating and that she's going to bed at a time that feels good for you um that's my big fear right that that

much like a child who's been really restricted with sugar and then you give them free access to sugar they're going to binge and i know that it well i don't know with sugar that at some point it's good it's going to calm down another topic for another day but um with sleep i worry that you know my son gets really into projects and um and i worry that's one that's my big worry is that he would

pretty consistently not go to sleep at a reasonable time and also that even if at some point it calibrated that on the way to calibration it would be really challenging not just for me but also for him so in my observation even you know one really poor night of sleep can often throw him off for more than just a day and can be hard to recover from um and even though yes he's going to school getting him to school when so

right now he's having trouble waking up in the mornings and not wanting to get out of bed and that you know starts to shift into school refusal and um it's challenging yeah and and there probably will be a period of time if if this has been restricted uh that he is going to go to bed later than he has been right now and that that may lead to more struggles in the morning and so the question really becomes is

what we're doing right now working if what we're doing right now is working then chances are you wouldn't have reached out to me um if it is working then we don't necessarily need to do this but you reached out because what something about what you're doing right now is not feeling right to you and or to him and thus yes it could lead to a few days potentially a couple of weeks where

things are difficult but we're not just um sort of not saying anything about it in in between times we're just saying okay no more no more set bedtime you can go to bed whenever you like and that's the last we talk about it every day we're going to be talking about how are you feeling we're going to be keeping track of what time we went to bed last night and oh yeah last night you went to bed at 10

o'clock right how did you feel when you woke up this morning and what was the rest of today like for you what are you thinking might be good for uh how what time you want to go to bed tonight um it seems as though maybe you're you're getting super invested in your projects and you're having a hard time breaking away from those so that you can go to bed at that time what can we help you with to make that

easier maybe there you get to a certain point and you decide you want to take a break or if it's a book maybe it's a certain chapter or maybe there are some activities that are just so engrossing that they're not good activities for right before bed because you do get so tunnel visioned into them and you don't want to come out again maybe there's a good activities for earlier in the evening and we're going to do something

in the evening that allows us to stay at a bit more sort of higher level with it not so engrossed and so it's easier to come out of it and and go to bed at a time that we think might be might be useful for you what do you think about that yeah um i like the idea of processing it that it's an active process you know there's change and we're implementing it and your child is old enough that that

you can have this conversation with them right this doesn't have to be a decision like we're going to do this now this can be a hey i'm learning about this and i'm really hesitant about it and i don't know if this is going to work for our family yeah what do you think what do you think might happen if we tried this yeah what would happen if you woke up tired in the morning and you can talk about this in total

hypotheticals what what could i do to support you to get to sleep at a time that you wouldn't feel tired in the morning okay do we want to give this a try yeah that's what i was that's how i tend to approach things so that's what i was envisioning um i was i was interested and a little relieved to hear i thought the success of this was in some ways dependent on not having to be up at a certain point so we homeschooled

last year and did have more flexibility and i do think his natural sleep rhythm and mind to be honest is to go to bed a little later and wake up a little later but when you don't have that luxury um so it was good to hear that you did so you did this while she was in a school environment and had to wake up at a certain time yeah yeah and if you check into uh dr winter's

book uh he describes a slightly more hardcore way of going about this and he will actually say okay what what is the time that you need to be up we're going to wake you up at that time and then you i i forget the exact like how you decide on what time bedtime is but it is going to be late it is going to be like midnight and you are going to do everything you can to keep that child awake until

midnight they're going to go to bed at midnight they're going to wake up at 7am absolutely exhausted and then when it comes down to the next night then they're gonna go to sleep and you're sort of backing into uh what is the time that they actually need to go to sleep to me the whole you know i'm gonna do everything i can even if it's really unpleasant to keep you awake just seemed more uh more more hardcore more sort of antagonistic

than i was willing to do um if your child is significantly struggling with sleep then i could see potentially going down that path but for a child who's not really struggling with sleep it's just the bedtime routine is not working for us then i'm not sure that we need to go that far i also think that's not necessarily effective because you get sleep sometimes right if you have an overtired child sometimes they actually have a harder time falling

asleep so in my experience and it could backfire sometimes although i think his point is if the child is in bed for a long period of time and struggling to go to sleep then that's something that can be useful uh to figure out how much sleep do they actually need yes um catherine i'm curious about what's coming up for you as you're you're hearing all this conversation yeah well i i was it was interesting to hear um how

you kind of set up your reaching from dinner on to bedtime because dinner is another area that has impacted our bedtime routine as well um a lot of times our daughter will only pick out a few things at dinner and then later she'll say that she's hungry you know once she's already like getting in bed and we've tried a few tactics like

um trying to we haven't been too successful with like saying no more food after this time because i think i guess it's we feel bad to deny her food when she says that she's hungry um so lately we've been letting her eat some food upstairs until it's like time to brush teeth and then maybe

we cut it off but that's contributed to the later bedtime yeah what are you allowing her to eat in the evening um usually something that's not too messy like um cucumbers or apple slices okay does she like those yeah she's i mean maybe that's encouraging you read my mind [Laughter]

yeah so there's a couple things that you could do if you wanted to shift something on that the first would be you put out food at dinner time and then leave your child's plate on the table until they go to bed you could cover it if you feel you need to but after dinner is on the table the only food that's offered is what's on your plate and yes if you're still hungry absolutely feel free to go back and eat what's on your

plate um and then at bedtime that goes away if your child is still hungry after that it helps to have something in your back pocket that is a tolerated but not liked snack so that if they are genuinely hungry we're not going to withhold for food from a child who is genuinely hungry but also we're not encouraging them to uh to drag out this bedtime that is contributing to you and your partner not getting alone time in the evenings

by requesting more of a favored food so for us for a long time it was frozen mixed vegetables requires no prep for me because she would eat them frozen we'd just pull them right out of the bag and stick him in a bowl and if she was really hungry she'd eat them and if she wasn't really hungry she'd be like okay i'm gonna brush my teeth

so do you think that could help potentially yeah i think so um

i guess yeah part of it is we need to be a little more firm with limits because she'll say well i don't want that i want something else and if we kind of give in and say then she's encouraged to keep doing that right yeah and let me just uh tease out a little distinction there between limits and boundaries when we're setting a limit on somebody's behavior we're saying what you must do we're trying to change your behavior when we're setting

a boundary we're saying what i am not willing to do so i am not willing to prepare any more food for you is a boundary and the key thing about a boundary is we have to decide in advance that it fits with our values that this is important to us that that my connection time with my partner in the evening is important enough that i am not going to encourage this staying up later and later and later by

um by providing preferred snacks so uh so when you get clear in your own mind why are we doing this it stops becoming this arbitrary well okay i'll get it for you today and it just becomes this is what i am and i'm not willing to do and if that is grounded in your values it becomes super easy to hold that and and that really comes from getting clear on is this time with your partner in the

evening really important to you if it is then that boundary becomes super easy to set and hold um if it's not then that's its own challenge by itself and also you will probably continue to find that you'll you'll waver yeah that makes a lot of sense um and i i when you brought up the um challenge of or the need that the child might have more connection time that really sounded accurate

um because a lot of times she will stall that time because she'll want to play more with us she'll want us to keep yeah telling more stories or or even hold her longer so yeah i think where we struggle is holding the boundaries um because well sometimes we'll tell her okay we can spend this time together you know we'll set a timer for like 20

minutes but then she's still resisting and yeah so then it really does become is this time with my partner important enough but i i'm okay with this getting pushed out every single night and i'm not feeling connected to my partner right now because i'm not spending any time with them um whereas if if we are crystal clear in our own mind that we need this time for ourselves for our relationship

then then setting and holding that boundary becomes a lot easier and it comes from that clarity about why we're setting it um yes we're trying to meet our child's need and and we want to be looking okay do have i really connected with her today have i played one-on-one with her have i done it during doing things that she really enjoys not like yeah we're having a one-on-one time while i'm folding the laundry and and that we have genuinely connected

today and if you can say yes to that it is okay to set a boundary and say we've had our connecting time and now it's my time to spend with mom or daddy who whoever your partner is um that you don't have to always give

give give to a child because what that teaches a child is that it's not okay to have boundaries right and if we think about um that this sort of goes into more macro issues

many of us had our needs disregarded as children and we didn't have anyone to model boundary setting for us you know maybe our parents maybe maybe our mother particularly tense tends to be the female figure in the family who just kind of got walked all over a little bit and didn't set their own boundaries didn't feel as though they could set their own boundaries and so now we see you know some some parenting woman on a podcast says i need to set

boundaries and i'm like i don't even know where to set them i don't know how to identify my needs and so it's it can be super challenging to say you know what i have a need to connect with my partner i have a need for self-care time that is valid um because i have because i am a person i have a right in a way to have my needs met just as you have a right to have

your needs met and so i'm going to help you to meet those needs and if it gets to a point where i cannot see how to meet both of our needs i cannot see how to connect with you and get the self-care time that i know i need i'm going to set a boundary and i'm going to say that i am important enough in this family to also have my needs met um it's it can be super challenging

particularly for female identifying people to identify those needs in the first place and then to set those boundaries it's this is i mean it sounds like we're talking about bedtime and in a way we are but in a way we're talking about stuff that's so much deeper inside us than that yeah that that definitely resonates um yeah all of that it's yeah it's really i thought it was about the bedtime and then the more i mm-hmm

considered like where the problem lies it's it is the boundaries and that it's not just at bedtime it's any transition time with hers challenge and i think a lot of it is yeah feeling like guilty like i'm not connecting with her enough because she always wants more connection but i also need to honor my own needs exactly yeah and and to the extent that we can do both we will but it's not always possible to meet

everybody's needs many more times than we might think uh like for example if uh gila you you and i were emailing in advance and and you were talking about you haven't read a book in forever and maybe you are perfectly happy being in the same room with your child reading a book while they're doing their project there's no rule around no set bedtime that says you must be in a separate room you know that we we have this idea in

western culture that our self-care time needs to happen by ourselves in a different room and that we it needs to involve quiet um people in many cultures don't have that and and if if you don't have that and you are able to feel fulfilled and have your need met while your child is in the same room go for it and the the critical part here is that both people's needs get met but if it's not possible

to do that that's when the boundaries become useful yeah i can definitely relate to the talk about boundaries and

i i find it particularly uncomfortable at bedtime because it is sort of this this time of vulnerability and of you know your kids want to snuggle and um and one of my questions for you was you know i still lie down with my son until he falls asleep and so um if i'm leaving him to do his activity

that is not only a change in how we're doing bedtime but it's a change in the connection that's available to him and that feels like it's sort of a different component so as you were talking i was i i like what you were saying that we may initially think well what i need is time to do acts but but really the need might be able to be met in other ways um and i was thinking you know i wonder

like i would love to have time to consistently be yoga like so maybe in the same room while he's doing a project i can do some yoga um or something like that i don't know i'm percolating on it yeah absolutely and and what you're getting at what you're getting to is self-care time really what does self-care look like for me and and also maybe exercise um so so is is that the strategy we want to use to to cover our self-care

and our exercise does that work for everybody and works for you also works for your son or do i need to build self-care and exercise into other aspects of my day so that when i get to bedtime those are already taken care of and i'm not sitting there steaming because my need hasn't been met today right right and i do try to and i don't usually do yoga at night so that would be a shift for me

um but yeah i was trying to think of how how to do this in a way that doesn't feel like a big shift in sort of removal of um of that connection and i i thought it was really intriguing what you were saying that like you set a time of i'm available until this time um and i need to i need to think more about that because um yeah like i feel like it could start feeling to him

like um almost a contingency of punitiveness of well if you don't go to sleep by nine i'm not lying down with you right um but but i think there's a way to present it that that hopefully it wouldn't be okay uh how do you feel about lying down with him right now so if he takes an hour and a half to fall asleep i am going crazy um i do also i will say sometimes false

local time so um and and sometimes that's good for me and sometimes it's not um i don't i i like it i think it's um it's not something that i'm like chomping at the bit to get rid of and it's a connection point that i think we both enjoy um i do worry sometimes you know i want him to be able to fall asleep um eventually without me i don't know i i sort of for the most most of me for

the most part trusts that that will come when he's ready but um yeah yeah yeah i think throughout my work with families i really enjoy encourage people to think about is there a problem here is this working for you parent is this working for you child if it is there's no problem here it doesn't matter what society says about you have a child of a certain age and you're still sleeping you know you're still lying with them

next to them to go to sleep people in many cultures around the world lie next to their kids to go to sleep every

night and their kids turn out fine yeah yeah and it's a sweet time and um i think the only time that it's a problem is when um he's passing and turning yeah and and you'll need to play with this right this this isn't a one-and-done conversation this is how we're going to do it and this is how

it's going to play out you're going to need to see how it goes and then readjust so you may decide um that that nine o'clock is your time that if you are going to bed child before nine o'clock then i'm gonna be able to to lie next to you if it's after that i i'm going to be doing my own things and i'm not going to be available and i i don't see that as punishment i see that

as a boundary as something that says i have needs as well and and i'm not saying there's no nothing magic about nine o'clock that that's my boundary that's what meets my needs yours may be entirely different and so the key challenge for you is to think about well what really is my need here is my need for intellectual stimulation well could i listen to a podcast while we're falling asleep together um what else could i do that helps to meet my

need and also meet his need and if we don't see a way to make those two things happen then that's when we use a boundary um but but again this is uh you you'll try it you'll you'll say okay nine o'clock the time before that yes i'll lie with you after that no um and then okay yeah i i'm realizing that actually maybe 9 30 might be a better time like i'm feeling as though my needs

are being met i have enough time to do the things that i want to do what if we tried 9 30 for a bit or maybe you try 10 and you realize yeah actually not enough time let's wind that back a little bit what you're doing here is is not just making decisions about bedtime you are starting to use a way of being with your child that holds both of your needs with equal weight it doesn't say you know permissive we're

going to do everything you want it's the opposite of that it's saying your needs and my needs have equal weight and when we can meet both we're going to do that and how we do that is this constant negotiation throughout our lives not in a in a bad way where the child is like i want this i want this no one listen you're like seriously um but in a way where i s it's like yeah i see your need isn't

being met here and my need isn't being met here either what are we going to do about that and that is a practice that will hold you and carry you the two of you the three of you however many's in your family through the rest of your lives and also that they will take out into the world and use with other people when they see oh your need isn't being met in this situation mine isn't either

what are we gonna do about that you know this is so that what you're practicing here is so much bigger than just sleep how much time do you well in your experience with your daughter jen like you said you've kind of adjusted things as she's gotten older were there signs that it needed to change like um was she starting to resist some aspect of it um i'm glad you picked up on the word resistance

and so so when when you're seeing resistance in a child and when you're feeling resentment yourself those are

the two keys that you're gonna know that something isn't working with the way that you're doing it right now with whatever you've landed on that maybe has worked quite unquote for six months and all of a sudden your child's resisting something or all of a sudden you're like you know what this doesn't feel good to me that's how you know that something needs

to change there is no sort of marker necessarily it's really much more fluid than that it's yeah we've been doing it this way for a while and you know i realize i actually can't do this wholeheartedly like i can't actually say yes i want to do this for you i want to do this with you um that that if i can't say that and and there's some part of me that's like really i don't want to

that's a signal for me that something about this needs to change so um and and of course things things shift a little bit she'll just kind of organically by themselves so maybe there'll be a project a particular project that's already set up in the living room and she'll say you know can i do this project i'm going to do it by myself you don't have to do anything yes yeah i'm good that's okay um so so the more she's gotten older the

more that kind of flexibility works you may find that with a younger child that um that having them in the living room quickly turns into mama i want this mama i'm still hungry mama can you do this for me and and so you may decide to try it and then you'll say you know what my knee isn't being met here and so the only way that i can see right now to make this work is if you

stay in your room so you can always try things and and then acknowledge my need isn't being met here and and i i would like to go back to the way that we've been doing it before that's less helpful yeah what else what other reasons do you have that you may not want to try this i had if i can introduce a thought about the snacking at night which feels like a very concrete point but actually i think does relate to this

discussion about boundaries um you may already be doing this but i wonder if it sounds like right now it may be a bit of like a boundary pushing exercise in this like tension of should we let her should i ask and so i wonder if she's consistently hungry or saying that she's hungry before bed if you can like in a more consistent way sort of plan for there to be a snack that you're comfortable with maybe it's even a piece

of dinner so maybe at dinner you say we're gonna set this aside for so my son we did this for a while he was always hungry right before bed um so we would do midnight snack at seven o'clock but then it feels so much more special [Music] better than an 8 pm right so so um where so then it's coming from the parent right it's still it's it's you're comfortable with this you have you know decided on it it's not her kind of

pushing but she wants to see what she can get not that i don't know if she's doing that but no i think she is i mean i i don't i don't personally see kids as manipulative or anything like that i just think you know she may sort of feel this this draw to that so and and she it may help her to be able to count on it right to know i don't need to worry about being hungry

right before bed mom and dad have her mom and mom whatever have this set and and i can count on that um and so it might take that power struggle out of it yeah i think that's that is a good suggestion uh yeah i think i've maybe it's more of like um the expectation in my mind of how it should be like she should just sit down and eat dinner with us

instead of getting up from the table after two bites and running off to play so yeah there's societal expectations of what things should look like are super super powerful and that's how getting at needs helps us to overcome that and actually do things that work for us instead of getting caught in well it's supposed to look like this she's supposed to do this and i'm supposed to say that and it's supposed to work um whereas i think um what's super

important and what gila is saying is if you don't mind her snacking at this time it's okay there's no problem here if she is a late eater and you're you're sitting with her maybe you're chatting with her while she's eating in a way that you're not able to do at dinnertime um then there's no problem here the problem is there if that is detracting from the time that you are wanting to spend with your partner and it's not possible for

you to spend time with your partner at another point in the day because one or both of you works outside the house or leaves super early or whatever it is so um so really it all always all comes back down to needs is the way we're doing it right now or the way that i'm thinking about that we could do going to meet our needs all of our needs if yes let's do it who cares what society says and if no then let's

let's not do that and let's try and come up with a way that we think can meet both of our needs yeah that's really helpful yeah so what what are you excited about and what are you planning from here well i'm yeah i'm i'm excited about trying it out like i think i was jumping to all the reasons that it might not work but yeah i think it's worth trying it and

knowing that it's something that will be tweaked over time and uh like we don't have to find the perfect solution that will last forever yes exactly okay so let's make sure that we get you on a path that feels good and that is likely to set you up for success how are you planning to approach this conversation with your partner conversation with your child how is this going to play out for you yeah i think starting

the conversation with my husband first to make sure that we're both on the same page and that we identify our needs individually and as a couple so that we know the boundaries that we want to hold i think this is the first step and then we can maybe brainstorm together how it might look and then present it to her her options yeah and and for a younger child i think presenting options is is appropriate um to the extent that the child can

express why they don't want to go to bed and and express their needs then then we start to to take those on and hold them uh to the to the extent that we can um but particularly if you're sort of in the twos and threes and then then setting up a these are your options i think is a an appropriate way of going about doing that yeah sounds like a plan gila um yeah i'm percolating i i have to say

i'm feeling less skeptical than i did before this conversation um i really was thinking well if i'm gonna try this maybe i'll try it over the winter break from school and um but i actually like the idea now of it might be harder to get him up at a consistent time during winter break so yeah um yeah i think i think what i have decide what i can commit to um

is to having a conversation with him about it we do i do talk through these things with him um walk through these things um and i think it's worth the conversation um and maybe giving it a try i just need to first i think think through a couple of things for myself about what those needs are um and how i might want to meet them and uh where my boundaries are before i um yeah yeah okay and i think um just to pick up on

your idea of when to do it uh yes we can do it over winter break the challenge with doing it in winter break is as you say there's no need to be up at a certain time in the morning and what you may find is that the child sort of settles into a routine of going to bed quite late getting up quite late and then it's difficult to make another transition once school starts again they think they've got it figured out they

know how to regulate themselves and then all of a sudden oh no actually we have to be up two hours earlier than that whereas if you start during a period of time when you do have to be up early then it's like okay yeah when i need to be up at seven this is this is what it feels like late at night i'm still learning what you know they're gonna they're gonna mess up there are going to

be days when they're like i'm fine i'm fine i want to keep doing what i'm doing and then in the morning they're like i'm not fine and and i mean think about the ways we mess up in understanding what what our needs are and there is so much younger with so much less experience and and so and not even fully developed prefrontal cortexes and all the stuff that it takes to fully engage in planning so anticipate that

they're going to mess this up and get it wrong and think that when things are going to turn out one way and actually they're going to turn out another and we're going to scaffold their learning through this process and say hey you know when when this happened last night you ended up feeling like this and what does that mean for how we're going to do things moving forward and yeah if you start that on a day when you have to be

up at a certain time then it turns into okay now it's winter break okay we can let it slide a little bit but we're gonna remember what it's like to have to be up at a certain time and we know we're gonna have to transition back to that once school starts again so yeah yeah and one of my concerns is that i do now sort of point out wow it's really hard for you to get out of bed last

night you went to bed later than normal you know you would have like interesting right um but it might it might register in a different way if it's his own decision to go to bed later i don't know yeah do you like being told what to do right exactly exactly do any of us like being told what to do right right no i'm intrigued yeah there's something about making the decision for yourself

um i mean think about how hard our kids work to just stay out of bed to just stall the process when we have a time that they have to be in bed and and then they start going to bed at the time that they that we wish they would have been going to bed all along because they get to make the decision i mean i if someone tells me you must do x i might have been going to do that

anyway but now i'm like i think i'd rather do y [Laughter] because i want the autonomy to make that decision for myself right and children are just learning about autonomy and resisting is is one of the very few ways that they have to exert their autonomy to say i i want to have some control over my own life i i want to say what happens to make decisions about my own body and so that's where that resistance

comes from and and if we sort of drop our end of the rope as it were and and stop pulling on the other end so that there's nothing to resist then that just kind of evaporates and and the need to constantly be pushing just goes away and so you it's possible you'll find that he may actually go to bed earlier because he's gotten to choose it we've we've definitely absolutely seen that with children i mean i'm just thinking

of of someone in the parenting membership whose whose child was resisting getting dressed and and this memory lives in norway so getting dressed is sort of a necessity to go to school in the morning um and and the members super super worried about well what happens if they don't get dressed they're gonna get sick they're gonna you know get cold it's gonna be really bad and and so there was so much pressure from the parent to make the

child get dressed and then one morning a parent says to the child you know what you can you can manage getting dressed yourself it's okay you can you can choose whatever you want to do and what happens child runs off and gets dressed and it's just that the child wanted to have the say over what happened to their own body yeah um i do have one question that i realized i didn't yeah um so if i feel like in the sleep literature

i've also read that um it's recommended to keep the bed and off in the bedroom mostly for sleep and for adult activities so if they're in one of my concerns is that if the bedroom becomes you know this place where he spends lots of time doing fun projects and things like that like is that in a way going to affect his ability not not his like cognitive resistance to sleep but even

just his his physical ability to associate bed with sleep and to get into that suit yeah um yeah i've definitely seen that in the literature as well um curiously more in the adult facing literature uh yeah and i'm wondering that i don't yeah now you draw it out dr winter had also written a book about adult sleep that i read and yeah that's super prominent in that book and not at all mentioned in the rested child

so yeah it has not been our experience at all and with the parents that i've worked with as well actually i have not uh ever heard of anyone say my child is now spending more time in their room doing things other than sleep and all of a sudden they're having a harder time falling asleep if that is a concern for you then you may or or if it actually happens like you try it and it actually happens that

the child is having a harder time falling asleep you could always relocate some of those activities to another room perhaps a corner of your bedroom or a corner of the living room and if spending time apart from the child is something you're trying to achieve then you just separate them in other ways sort of non-traditional ways like you and your partner spend some time in the bedroom um or your child is in your bedroom doing something in a corner and

you're in the living room um so so i would say i have not seen it play out in that way um and i have i wouldn't be too concerned about it um if you are concerned about it you could always preempt it and just separate those activities the sleep from from the pre-sleep activities if you want to or just give it a try and see if it even is an issue and if it is then deal with it

then and if it's not then it's not yeah and as i'm thinking about it i think a lot of kids who use their room also um yeah yeah we have a lot of sleep challenges in our culture that people in many other cultures don't have yeah so yeah it's interesting to reflect on where that might be the case okay so it sounds as though you're both feeling fairly confident at least about having conversations with the other

people in your lives to uh to sort of start setting this in motion and seeing if it's something that you think might meet both of your needs there any final questions as we wrap up that you're like if i could just get this one thing answered i will be confident that we're on the right track here i guess one other question is um like if at some point in the process you as a the adult want to go to bed before

your child decides to go to bed um well i guess i'm just imagining that maybe you would need some parameter on like having the door shut at a certain time or the length they would turn the lights off themselves yeah yeah and um maybe one parent goes to bed earlier than the other and the going to bed early parent is not available after 10 o'clock or whatever your your witching hour is your magic time and that means

the other parent is going to put you to bed if you're going to bed after the only parent or after both parents then um yeah it's that's going to be something you're going to need to navigate by yourself um we are not going to be adjusting our sleep time to meet the child's need here so so the child may then decide well you know what actually um i really want to be tucked in and and my need for connection in those

last few minutes before i go to sleep is more important to me than finishing this project and so i'm going to wrap this up now because i want to be tucked in um so so yeah again it comes down to uh what are the needs of the individuals participating and also making sure your house is safe obviously for a child of a certain age to to be up past past their parents you may decide to make your bedtime a little bit later if

you're seeing this an issue just for the first week or two just while they're in this period of pushing it and seeing is my parent really gonna let this go this far are they really gonna reign me in after two days if i if i go to bed at 11 because if so i'd better make the most of this so you may decide that there's you may find that there's a period where um where there is some pushing and things

are happening later um and you may want to accommodate that and just say you know what i'm going to tuck you in i'm gonna tuck you in tonight and just make sure that you're okay um and then if it goes beyond a week or two at the most or what or basically whatever feels right to you then it's gonna be like this is this is not working for me long term and so i i'm gonna meet my need and

i'll be available to chuck you in until 10 o'clock and after that you'll need to shut the lights off by yourself yeah yeah one thing that just struck me that i'm kind of assuming is that i i'm gonna i would make a no screen rule yeah we would definitely have a nice green rule in that in that period as well um yeah i think the uh there's as with anything there's research on both sides of that

saying it's an issue saying it's not an issue um i i believe it could potentially be an issue and also even if the the light itself is not an issue certainly we know that children uh are going to get sucked into i don't want to use the word addiction because that means a certain thing um but they tend to get sucked into uh things that they really enjoy and chances are they're going to have a hard time shutting it

off so um so really we're going to stay away from anything that they might um that they might have a hard time breaking away from so um and then one other thing that i realized we haven't talked about is i i'm realizing that both of you only have one child and how could this work with more than one child um and so that your your question about screen time brought that up for me because it's sort of you know how does it impact

other people and well what if the child decides i want to run around the house and and have a party in my after after um stories time and there's a baby sleeping and so yeah that that there's there would need to be restrictions on that because the baby current article the baby will articulate when you wake them up and they'll cry and and then it doesn't meet your need and so there's a whole bunch of people whose

needs are not being met and so yeah there would need to be uh more potentially stringent restrictions on a child who has a sibling who is trying to get to sleep than you might need for a child who is an only child and and it's only the parents who were who were potentially inconvenienced uh who are there um you also may decide if you have more than one child and particularly if a child is an infant

to to just play with do i want to introduce this right now is this another potential source of stress that i need in my life if the baby's not sleeping you're up every couple hours in the night nursing anyway is your older child going to bed later uh something that is is worth dealing with um my hypothesis might come down on the side of no in that particular circumstance and you may want to wait until things are more

settled with the baby and the baby sleeping longer and you have a bit more mental bandwidth to cope with a child an older child who might be staying up a little bit later um hopefully the older child is old enough that you then also might be able to have conversations about what activities are appropriate during um during after hours time so that would be right i think the guiding principle that you presented helps work through that right

identifying everyone's needs exactly yeah yeah and and um if it's possible the the older child might say well you know my need is for play and activity [Laughter] in that time and then okay well let's get you play activity earlier in the day and uh so that hopefully you you have other needs that we can meet during this time and if it is not possible again we it may not be possible to meet everybody's needs all the time in which

case um we'll have a boundary if we can but we may end up needing to set a limit to say something that is going to say you know you need to change your behavior if if we want this to work if you want to be able to stay up um then the limit is you can't make loud noises or you have to be in certain rooms in the house that are further away from the baby's room and and that those limits

are needed to make sure the baby's needs are met to make sure my needs are met and also to meet yours to the extent that we can so and so a judicious use of limits i think can be helpful particularly when there's more than one child involved all right so it seems as though you're both you're both heading in this direction and i would love to hear how it goes maybe you wouldn't mind reaching out in a couple weeks and just

letting us know how these conversations are going what you're trying and perhaps i can post an update on the episode page uh when we have some some more to share would that be okay yeah okay all right well thank you very much for for both of you for reaching out and and being willing to to come on camera and uh and share what's going on for you and and dig deeper than the sleep stuff and to be able to to realize that yes

some of it's about the sleep stuff but a whole lot of other stuff here is is not about sleep so i'm really grateful for for both of you for being here thank you thank you so much i also wanted to mention that i recorded this episode at the end of november 2021 and in january 2022 i reached out to gila and catherine to see how things were going and there is some information from them in a video on the episode page

for this episode so you can find that at your parentingmojo.com forward slash no set bedtime and so there's there's updates from them as well as thoughts from me on what seems to be going well and some ways they might want to consider adjusting their approach too so i hope you find that useful if you are considering trying this for yourself [Music]