

february @ symbio

upcoming presentations

Setting Limits & Dealing with Tantrums

Testing limits is part of a toddler or preschooler's job description, which can make for some tough moments for parents trying to maintain control and good humor at the same time. We'll talk about healthy and effective ways of establishing boundaries that support a child's sense of self as well as a parent's sense of sanity. We'll also talk about the meaning and management of temper tantrums: how they related to limit testing, what can be gained from them and what your response to a tantrum means to your child. The presentation will include plenty of time for q & a.

Two dates:

Tuesday 2 February
7:30pm

@ Recess Urban Recreation
470 Carolina Street
San Francisco CA
RSVP:
signup@recessurbanrecreation.com
or (415) 701-7529

Recess members:
\$35/person or \$55/couple
non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple

Tuesday 23 February
7:00pm

@ Peekadoodle Kidsclub
Ghiradelli Square
900 North Point Street, F100
San Francisco CA
RSVP: info@thepkc.com

Peekadoodle members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple
non-members:
\$45/person or \$65/couple



q&a

I have boy/girl twins who turned three last week. They have always been good sleepers except for a few weeks at 21 months when my son learned how to vault out of his crib and climb in with his sister. We quickly put tents on their cribs and pretty soon the ruckus died down and peace returned. I've always heard three was a good age to transition to toddler beds. The problem is, while my daughter is ready to go and would like a pink bed, my son is in love with his crib. He likes to have a blanket placed over his crib tent and he zips himself in at night. He can unzip it too but never does. I had suggested getting beds for their birthday but my son adamantly rejected the idea. Their room is big enough that we could have the cribs and beds at the same time so I thought we could just introduce them casually sometime soon. I wasn't really worried until last week when my sister visited and told me she thought I had messed up his natural progression toward a bed by tenting the crib. Now I am thinking that many other kids do move to beds earlier and one of the moms in my mom's group thinks my sister might be right. So, what do you think, have I already damaged my kids' psyches and how do I deal with the transition to toddler beds now?

Don't believe the hype – you have not missed a window and you've certainly not inflicted any psychological damage. To the contrary, we would much rather see kids stay in a crib a little longer than they need to than to move to a toddler bed too early. There are no real downsides to a child staying in a crib for a few extra

months but the fallout from a premature move to a bed can be messy. Cribs provide containment for children, not just physically, but psychologically. Once the rails are gone, the directive to stay in bed creates the psychological containment that children need to help their minds and bodies prepare for sleep. However, for that directive to be meaningful, children must have developed enough impulse control to be able to comply with it. Most kids have this by age three, which is why three is generally regarded as a good benchmark for moving to beds. (Some have it before the third birthday, some need a little more time; girls tend to get there before boys and highly verbal children tend to be on the early side as well). However, many parents end up making the transition to toddler beds when children start to climb out of their crib. Admittedly, this timing makes intuitive sense. Unfortunately, it also usually leads to a whole series of new problems resulting from the fact that parents can't keep kids in bed. Without the boundary of a crib, and without adequate impulse control, it's very, very hard for a toddler to choose to stay in bed if s/he wants to get up. It's quite likely that you spared yourself, and your children, those problems when you introduced the crib tent. The fact that your son is so attached to his crib is a good indication that he has come to depend on the feeling of containment and security it provides. That's not a bad thing. In fact, it's good information about what allows your son to feel safe and relaxed. Developmentally, it's much better to have to find a way to translate that security to a new setup than it is to deal with his not having had the chance to internalize that deep feeling of security in the first place.

Your task now will be about making this transition gradual and predictable enough so that your children, and especially your son, are able to recreate the internal sense of containment that they associate with a crib in their new beds. This begins with simply talking about it with them. If you haven't already done so, put words to how they feel in their cribs – introduce terms like “cozy,” “relaxed,” “snuggly.” If your children have a name for what they are feeling in the crib, it will be easier for them to understand the feeling state they are trying to achieve in bed. Next, introduce the idea of beds. Tell them that you are going to get beds, let them help pick them out and decide where they will go. It's ideal that their room is big enough to have beds and cribs together. If your son rejects the bed you can reassure him he won't have to sleep in it – this will give him a chance to get used to it gradually. You can allow them each choose where they want to sleep at bedtime (although you may have to put limits on moving from bed to crib, or vice versa, after bedtime to avoid multiple changes). Talk the transition up in daytime in order to encourage their minds to process it with the parts of their brains that are more active in the daytime, which are responsible for intentional thought and adaptation. As your children become more comfortable with the beds, set a time to take the cribs down. Prepare them ahead of time and discuss in detail what the takedown will be like. Have a way of saying good-bye to the cribs, thank the cribs, take photos of the cribs. This is a real good-bye and, for some children, it will involve a grief process – and healthy grief must be done consciously. This will be especially important for your son if you have to take the crib down before he is fully willing to embrace sleeping in the bed all the time.

When your kids are sleeping in their beds (during the transition and after the cribs are gone), the key to success with keeping them in bed will be establishing the contained feeling they had in their cribs. This is where the talking that you did before will serve you well: let your kids figure out what sorts of things make their beds “cozy” or “snuggly” or whatever they liked about their cribs: a certain arrangement of pillows, an extra blanket tuck, etc. Your bedtime routine will also have renewed importance; be clear with your kids that once the routine is over, it's time for sleeping and staying in bed as surely as if they were zipped in their cribs. Finally, you may want to establish a routine of checking on them after you put them down in their beds. If either of them is feeling anxious about the newness of the bed, they will want to call you or get up and find you. If they succeed at this, they are then in control of how bedtime separation happens. This is a massive change from the setup with a crib. On the other hand, if you return to check on them, you remain in control. In addition, by returning to check on them, you limit their jobs to managing anxiety only for a brief period until you return; most kids are more willing to give this a go than to face getting through a whole long night. The key to using checking properly is to get back into the room before your kids get out of bed. If you can do this, you are reinforcing success and the process remains positive; you are also maintaining control of the coming and going. That's important because, ultimately, it's your children's sense that you are in control of the process that will make the directive to stay in bed feel containing – which, from a developmental perspective, is a very close neighbor to feeling cozy.

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