

FamilyCares™

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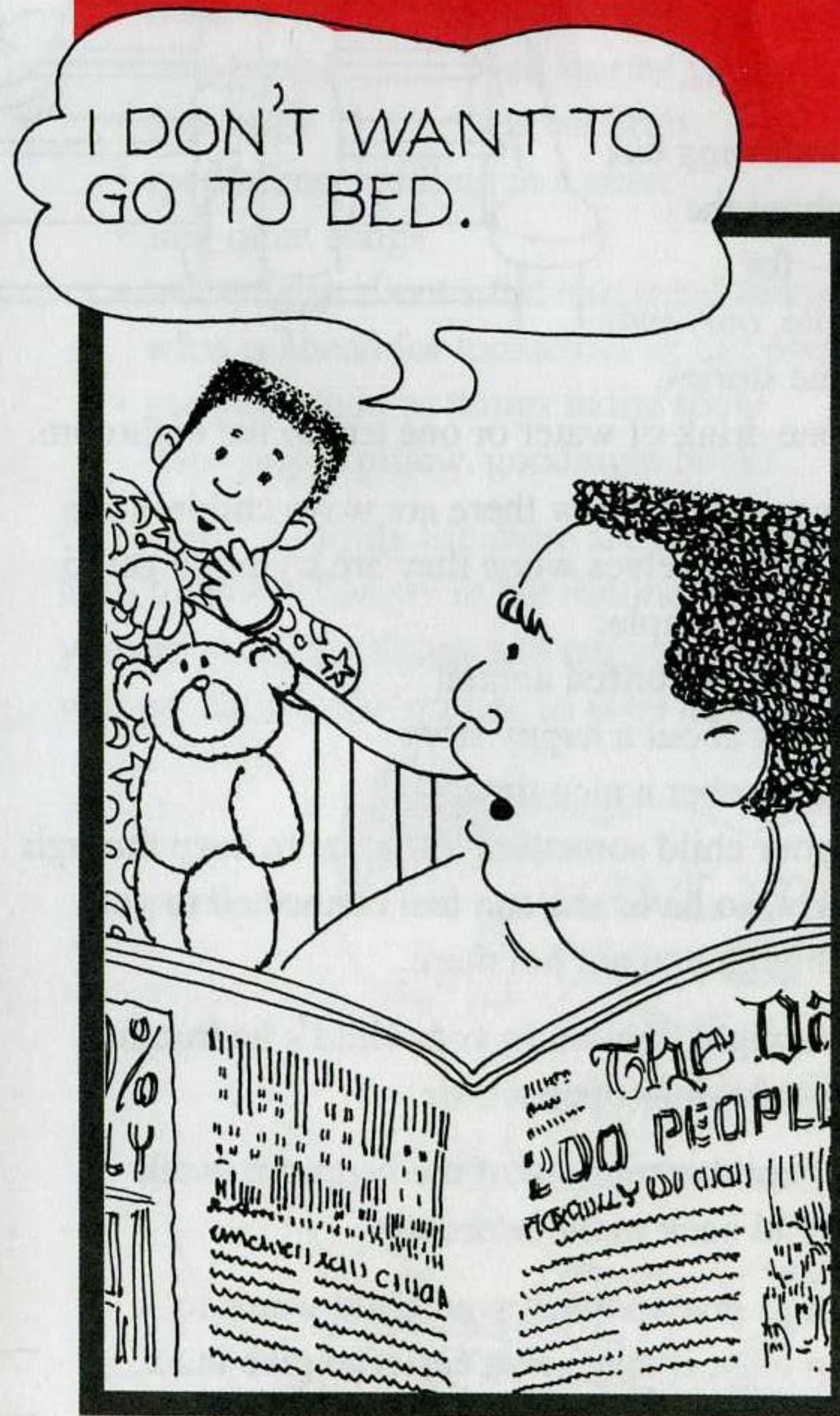


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## BEDTIME STRUGGLES



From the producers of MISTER  
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## Understanding BEDTIME STRUGGLES

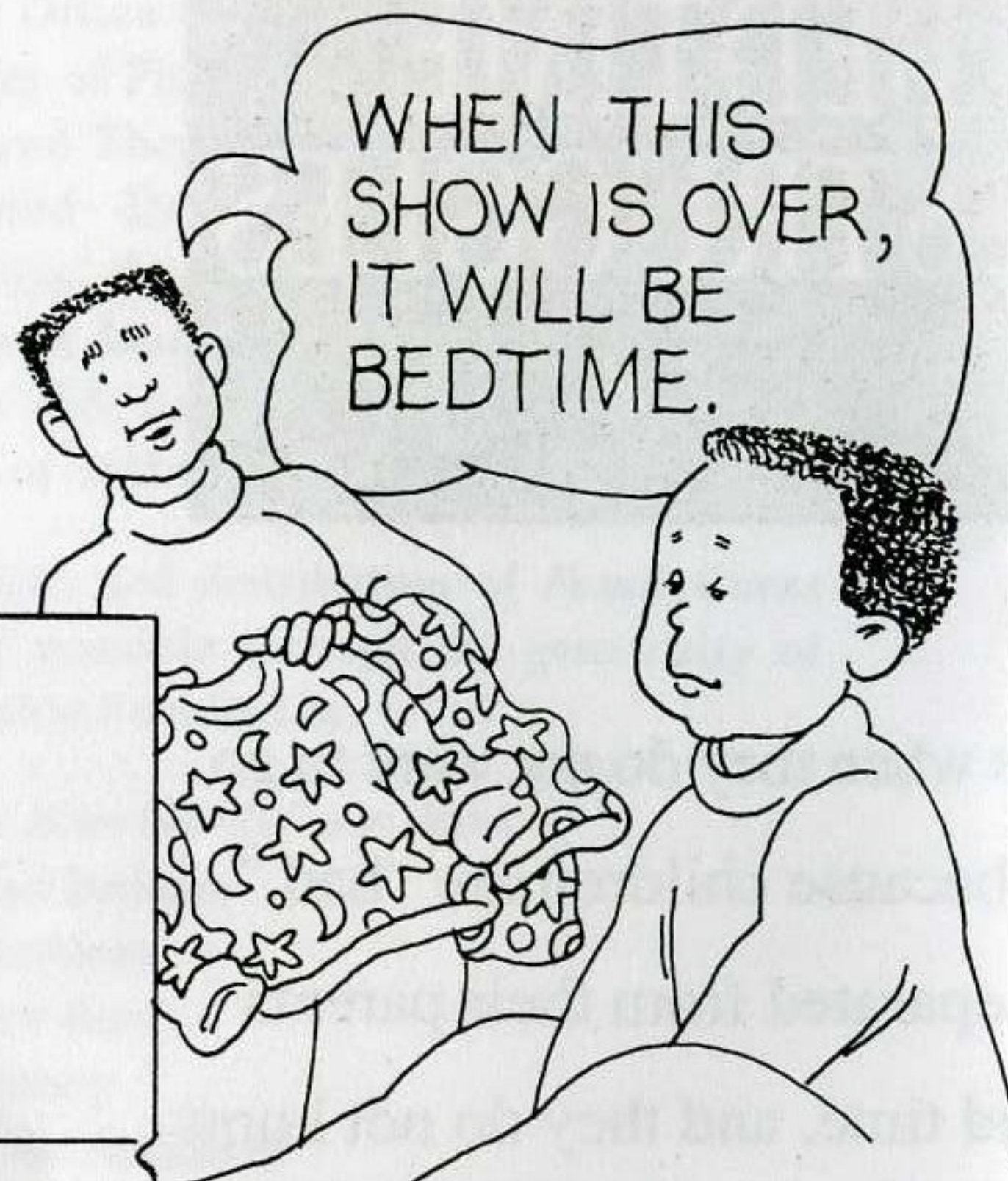
Almost all young children have times when they do not want to go to bed or to stay in bed. That is not because children are "bad." It is hard for young children to be separated from their parents at nighttime. They do not understand time, and they do not know when they will be together again with the people they love. Besides that, it is only natural that they do not like being told what to do and when to do it.

Bedtime problems can be hard for parents, too, because parents need some time in the evening to themselves. And, parents don't want to end the day angry with their children.

Even though most children struggle about going to bed, they can manage better when there are family rules for bedtime that are regular, kind, and firm.



# Helpful Hints BEDTIME STRUGGLES



**Include the same things each night as part of your child's bedtime routine.**

It is easier for children to manage if they know *when* and *what* to expect each night as they get ready for bedtime.

Here are things some families use in their children's bedtime routines:

- wash or bathe
  - brush teeth
  - read books
  - tell stories
  - give hugs
  - do backrubs
  - spend time cuddling in a chair
  - sing quiet songs
  - talk quietly about what happened today and what is ahead for tomorrow, or say prayers
  - say goodnight to things in the room
- "Goodnight pillow, goodnight books, . . ."

Of course, in family life there are times when you have to make changes in the routine. Explain why you are changing things and tell your child you will get back to the routine as soon as you can.



**Bedtime starts before it is time to say goodnight.**

- Do calm and relaxing things before bedtime to help your child settle down.
- Whatever you are doing before bedtime, remind your child that bedtime is next.
- Try speaking in a quieter voice.
- Read together, or sit and talk with your child. That can help your child (and you) calm down after a busy day.
- Avoid tackle or chase games or television programs that may get your child excited.
- If you give your child a snack, remember that foods with caffeine, like colas and chocolate, can keep children awake.

IT'S OK IF YOU CAN'T FALL ASLEEP RIGHT AWAY, BUT YOU NEED TO STAY IN BED.

**Let your child know it is important to stay in bed.**

Be comforting but firm about the rules – for example, only two bedtime stories, only one drink of water or one trip to the bathroom.

Help your child know there are ways children can comfort themselves when they are trying to get to sleep, for example:

- cuddle a stuffed animal
- think about a happy story
- remember a nice time

Give your child something of yours to keep through the night, so he or she can feel connected to you, even though you are not there.

Leave a night light on in your child's bedroom, or leave the door open a little.

If your child comes out of the bedroom, walk your child back to the bedroom.

Try not to give in when your child wants to stay up later. It may seem easier to give in to get your child to be quiet, but children like to know that their parents are in charge and firm about the rules.

**Sometimes crying at bedtime means your child needs more comfort from you.**

Even when bedtime struggles have been settled, sometimes your child may have more trouble at bedtime. It may be because he or she is sick or upset or excited or there have been changes in the family. . . or for no clear reason.

On those nights, spend a little extra time with your child before bed.

If your child cries hard after you have said goodnight, you could come in the room and sit nearby for a few minutes. A soothing backrub may help your child calm down.

Remember that bedtime struggles happen in most families, so you could get more helpful ideas from other parents, a relative or friend, or your child's doctor.

