

NIGHTMARES AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM:

A Parent's Guide to Children's Bad Dreams ¹

(Also Useful for Adults)

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Here is a set of guidelines for emergency use following a nightmare. To make it easy to use, I repeat some material in each section. Now would be a good time to read the first section on general principles for dealing with nightmares to get an overview. When your child has (or you have) a nightmare, turn to the section dealing with the nightmare in question for immediate help. Each section is independent so you don't have to continually refer to the beginning.

If your child's nightmare is not specifically described, locate the nearest equivalent. If nothing seems to fit, read the section on chase or attack dreams. (If you had the nightmare, think of the comments as referring to the child-in-you.)

Here are specific nightmares that are discussed individually:

Chase or attack	House on fire
Falling	Vehicle out of control
Injury or death	Being paralyzed or stuck
Kidnapped	Great water: tidal wave,
Being lost	flood, drowning

Note: When a child awakens during the night, parents must first of all determine whether the situation is a night terror or a nightmare. Read about the differences now to be better prepared when the time comes.

NIGHT TERRORS

If your child exhibits two or more of the symptoms listed below, he or

¹ Based on material from Chap. 12, *Your Child's Dreams*, Patricia Garfield (Ballantine, 1984).

she probably has “night terrors,” an episode of awakening from sleep in a state of acute panic. Most characteristic is the sense of extreme terror; often there is no recall of having dreamed.

Symptoms of Night Terrors

Child abruptly awakens with a piercing scream.

Child appears terrified or in pain.

Child cries, moans, yells, or mumbles incoherently.

Child sits up, jumps out of bed, or runs around.

Child’s eyes are open but unseeing; appears dazed; pupils dilate; may hallucinate

Child’s heartbeat is racing (double the normal rate).

Child perspires profusely.

Child breathes rapidly and shallowly; may gasp for breath.

Child remains agitated for several minutes to half hour.

Child rebuffs attempts to console; attack runs its course.

Child has been asleep only one-and-a-half hours (two-thirds of all episodes occur early in the night).

Child may have night terrors at any age but is often younger—three to five years old.

Child has little or no recall of dream imagery; any imagery consists of a single violent threat.

Child has no recollection of attack in the morning.

First Aid for Night Terrors

Be available and protective.

Do not attempt to hold forcibly or restrain child unless essential for security; restraint may intensify outburst.

Do not become angry or try to rouse the child by shaking, slapping, yelling, etc.

Touch child lightly; if possible, put arm around child or stroke face and arms soothingly.

Walk with child if he or she moves about restlessly.

Speak softly, calmly, and reassuringly, even if child does not appear to hear.

Say such things as “It’s all right. Everything’s all right. It’s all over. I’m here. You’re okay now,” etc.

A warm washcloth gently wiped over the face may help the child recover.

Let the child return to sleep as soon as possible.

Realize there is probably nothing seriously wrong with child; such attacks are usually symptomatic of an immature nervous system and are typically outgrown.

Probable Causes of Night Terrors

In children, this disorder is technically referred to as *pavor nocturnus*,

from Latin words meaning “night terror” Night terrors are considered to be a disorder of partial arousal. The episode begins in a state of very deep sleep (stage 4). Instead of moving gradually upward through lighter stages of sleep (stages 3 and 2) into a dream period (stage 1, or REM), the child is catapulted suddenly awake. The rapid shift of consciousness brings with it an overwhelming sense of dread.

Experts think that night terrors are the result of an immature nervous system, but we do not yet know exactly why they occur. Sometimes, however, high fevers, head injuries, or other physical trauma has triggered attacks. Emotional stress, fatigue, or a sudden external stimulus may also precipitate an attack. Researchers have produced an attack experimentally in some susceptible people by startling them awake with a loud buzzer; others remain unaffected.

Most experts say that this disorder upsets parents and spouses more than the victim, who usually does not remember the event. Night terrors in children almost always disappear without treatment.

Although night terrors are not usually thought to be related to emotional disturbance in children, adults who suffer from them say that emotional upsets intensify the experience. Experts are still debating how much influence the psychological component has in this disorder.

From one to five percent of all children have at least one attack of night terrors. (Figures vary from expert to expert.) These attacks are most common between the ages of three and seven years old, but they occur in all age ranges. Night terrors are more frequent in males, and since boys mature later, attacks last a longer time for them. Fortunately, most children outgrow night terrors by adolescence.

In adults, the equivalent experience to night terrors is called “incubus,” from a Latin word meaning, “to lie upon.” This term is based on the ancient notion that a demon or evil spirit possesses the victim during the night.

Adults who suffer from night terrors report feelings of overwhelming dread; an impression of being crushed or having great pressure on the chest; and they may sometimes experience muscle paralysis or difficulty breathing. Like children, most adults do not recall the attack by morning.

For adults, the attack may be a malfunction of the sleep process. Two-thirds of all adults report having had at least one night terror. As many as six percent say they have one attack a week, and some unhappy people experience attacks three or four times a week. An acquaintance of mine, a prominent opera singer, tells me that she has such experiences almost every night. Since she has a powerful voice, her shrieks awaken everyone within hearing distance, and her wild flailing has occasionally wounded her bed partner, to say nothing of startling him awake.

Several adult victims of night terrors have said that the attacks started during a major life change. Many (75 percent) attest that emotional strain intensifies the experience; some (15 percent) state that fatigue, too, affects the vividness of the experience. Victims of night terrors often have relatives who suffer from the same disorder; 14 percent of first-degree relatives also had attacks. Many people who have other disorders of arousal also have night

terrors; for instance, 33 percent of sleepwalkers and 16 percent of bed-wetters also experience night terrors. Similarly, 94 percent of people with night terrors also walk in their sleep.

Long Term Treatment for Night Terrors

If night terror attacks frequently disrupt the household, consult a pediatrician or sleep center. Sometimes neurological tests are recommended. Rarely, a mild epilepsy is indicated. Tests are usually, but not always, negative.

Mild tranquilizers, drugs that suppress deep sleep, may sometimes be prescribed. We know little about the long term effect of these drugs, however, and parents should proceed with caution. When night terrors are subsequent to concussions or other traumatic head injury, temporary use of drugs may be indicated.

Sleep expert Roger Broughton postulates that emotional conflicts erupt in night terrors when defenses are at their ebb in the deepest stage of sleep. Another dream expert, Rosalind Cartwright, says that when children do have some recall of the content of their night terror, the image is often of an animal about to attack. Adults, too, when they remember what created their dreadful anxiety, report being the target of murderous aggression; the ensuing panic is the terror of death. For example, Cartwright observed in her laboratory a man undergoing a night terror. He stared at what he thought was a man aiming a gun at him.

One child who suffered from night terrors was heard to repeat the word "seven" during his attacks. It was never determined what significance the term seven had for the child. If your child suffers night terrors and says anything that is coherent, note it carefully. It may provide a clue for unraveling part of the tangled ball of terror.

William Dement, who coined the term REM (rapid eye movements), and who heads a clinic for sleep disorders at Stanford University in California, is of the strong opinion that night terrors, or any of the disorders of partial arousal, should not be treated in children. He feels that most treatments are ineffective and make the child unnecessarily anxious. Patience, he says, is the only cure.

Oddly enough, at the same time that many experts advise parents that most children outgrow night terrors and nothing needs to be done, other experts give advice to adult victims of night terrors to increase their sense of security. They suggest locking windows and putting on night-lights to make the victim feel safer.

In fact, it seems to me that any activities parents can take to increase the child's sense of security and well-being are worthwhile.

NIGHTMARES

If your child exhibits two or more of the following symptoms, he or she probably has just had a nightmare, an episode of abrupt awakening from sleep in a state of anxiety. Characteristically, the child recalls having dreamed and the fearful events that were disturbing. The distinction between nightmares and unpleasant dreams is simply a matter of degree.

Symptoms of Nightmares

Child awakens upset, crying, and frightened.
Child rarely screams (in contrast to night terrors).
Child is shocked or anxious (but not in panic or terror).
Child makes slight or moderate movements, not wild flinging about.
Child does not perspire.
Child recalls a bad dream, often of a wild animal, villain, or monster in pursuit.
Child's dream recall is elaborate (often more than a single image).
Child may confuse dream and reality, yet is not insistently hallucinatory; is coherent.
Child may have difficulty describing feelings and fears.
Child realizes dream caused awakening.
Child responds to effort to calm; accepts reassurance.
Child has been asleep for some time, about half the night.
Child may have nightmare at any age, but if often older; average between seven and ten years.
Child still recalls nightmare in the morning.

First Aid for Nightmares

Encourage child to describe dream.
When content is established, refer to specific section dealing with that type of nightmare.
Discuss alternative solutions to the nightmare.
Suggest child use alternative solution if that dream ever recurs.
Read general principles below now. In an emergency, turn to the section dealing with the nightmare in question (or its nearest equivalent). Read the sections on Probable Causes and Long Term Treatment at leisure, and implement those that seem right for you.

General Principles for Dealing with Nightmares

Regardless of what type of nightmare your child had, keep in mind the following principle: you can empower your child to become *active rather than passive* in the dream; you can help you child *change* the dream.

Teach your child to confront and conquer danger in dreams; to fight rather than run or hide; to befriend rather than brutalize.

COMMON NIGHTMARES

Nightmare Emergency: Chase or Attack

- Description:** Child reports that a wild animal, evil person, monster, or other threat pursued or attacked him or her. The villain may catch, harm, eat, or kill the dreaming victim.
- Frequency:** This nightmare is the most common bad dream among all people. Most children have it fairly often. The nightmare is a natural response to some life stress.
- Usual meaning:** “I feel threatened,” either by some person in the environment or by an emotion with the dreamer. (Occasionally, this dream is a replay of an actual event.)

First aid

To make it easier to memorize these six steps, notice that the initial letter of each step spells the word dreams:

- Describe the dream
- Reflect the child’s feeling
- Express reassurance
- Align allies/take action
- Make drawing or other creative product from dream
- Seek long term solution

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
Then what did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child’s feeling.

If your child has spontaneously mentioned emotions he or she felt during the dream, “reflect” them, that is, rephrase them so that the child feels heard and understood. For instance, “You feel scared”; “You were afraid it would hurt you”; “You felt all alone,” and so forth. If the child hasn’t mentioned his or her feelings, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.

How did you feel?

Did you feel different when...(there was some change in dream)?

What was the very worst part? (Sometimes the answer to this is surprising; accept whatever it is.)

You felt scared.

You felt helpless.

The worst part was...(you were all alone, no one came when you called for help, and so on)

3. *Express reassurance.*

Lots and lots of children have that dream.

It didn't happen in the waking world, but it's still scary.

Most people don't know you can do something about bad dreams.

(Or, if based on actual traumatic event) We can't change what happened, but you can make your dream different.

4. *Align allies; take action.*

If you ever have that dream again, you can change it.

You don't have to let that person/animal/monster/thing hurt you.

Dreams are like magic; you can make things happen in them.

The next time that person/animal/monster/thing bothers you, turn around and face it.

Fight back.

You can have anyone you want in your dream.

Who's strong?

Who do you know who could help you in the dream? (If child can't think of anyone, suggest superheroes or heroines, Daddy, Mommy, a pet, religious figures, or other familiar and admired characters.)

You can call for help. (If child did so in dream, praise the attempt and encourage having the help appear next time.)

What if that happened in waking life?

What could you do? (Call the police, call 911 or other emergency number, be picked up by a helicopter, find a weapon, get a friend to help, run to a stranger and tell them you need help, and so on.)

Fight by yourself until help comes.

What could you do by yourself? (Glue the monster's mouth shut, put it in a cage, get a magic weapon, and so on.)

I wonder what would happen if you made friends with that person/animal/monster/thing. (Many children think this impossible at first; making friend is most useful after the child has had some experience confronting and conquering. If the person in the dream was an actual abuser or criminal, do not suggest the idea of making friends.)

Try asking what the person/animal/monster/thing wants.
Say, “Why are you chasing me?”
Make a trade with it: you teach me something—a song, poem, dance, idea—and I won’t make you go away.
If it may seem impossible, but big, scary creatures can change shape in dreams, become friendly, or give you a gift.
Try giving the person/animal/monster/thing a candy bar. Or play a game with it.
Just remember, the next time you have a dream like that, don’t run or try to hide: confront the person/animal/monster/thing and win. Or make friends with it.

Sample Solutions

An eight-year-old boy called upon “Ultraman” to help him banish his nightmares about a lion chasing him; a four-year-old girl called for her dog to help her during bad dreams; another four-year-old girl had her father move the stairs where a bad dream creature sat. A ten-year-old boy was aided by “Mighty Joe Young” in his nightmares; Superman rescued a five-year-old boy from a dream closet. A ten-year-old girl was saved from dream sharks by a strange man; a two-year-old girl was rescued by a fairy in white from a daddy-long legs who was chasing her. A five-year-old boy who was alarmed by a dream skeleton, a ghost, and Dracula trying to suck his blood, was protected by Casper the Friendly Ghost.

Other children saved themselves or other children in their nightmares. One little girl glued the dream monster’s mouth shut; another overfed the dream monster. A twelve-year-old girl jumped into the water and saved her friend from a dream shark; a boy of the same age saved a girl who was kidnapped by a dream ape. An eleven-year-old girl told the dream man who threatened her with a knife, “Don’t you dare!” Another girl of the same age who was frightened by a green monster in a “cold, dark, and very scary” cave, grabbed a stick and hit him on the head. The monster fainted. Yet another asked the monster why it was chasing her, and told him to leave her alone. He did..

Children have described to me still other methods of coping with their nightmares. A little girl from Asia told me that if someone is trying to kill you in a dream, you let them, then you take revenge. Another discovered that she could make a bad dream go away by squeezing her eyes very tightly during the dream. Still another girl puts an “X” across a dream scene she dislikes. Some children simply “turn the channel,” when they have a bad dream, as if it were a television program—and they get a better “show.”

A boy who was disturbed by nightmares about a monster was asked by his therapist to close his eyes and picture the beast clearly. Then the therapist told the boy he was going to chase the monster away. He yelled at it and slapped the desk, until the boy joined him in

monster chasing. A few sessions were sufficient to get rid of the boy's bad dream. Parents may find the same approach useful.

5. *Make a drawing or creative product from the dream image.*

(This method is useful for the next day or so after the nightmare).

You had such a good idea last night (or whenever) about how to deal with that person/animal/monster/thing. Would you show me how that dream looked. Draw me a picture of the dream. I'd really like to see.

Now show me how it would look when you use the better ending.

You can change that picture or draw a new one.

Why don't you make up a poem or story about that silly person/animal/monster/thing. (Assist as needed)

(Display dream drawings or other creative products.)

One little girl drew a picture of herself on a sandbank with an alligator chasing her from the water. To indicate that the alligator proceeded to eat her, she scribbled herself out on the drawing. A "redream" drawing might show the girl restored, with the alligator now in a cage. She chose to call the police to catch the beast. A ten-year-old boy drew himself wielding a magic sword to combat the wild animals that chased him and a friend in his nightmare. When a child has made a drawing of a dream, or succeeded in getting a "gift" from the villain that the child draws or makes, be sure to provide a place of honor for it.

6. *Seek long term solution.*

Exposure to the feared stimulus.

Sometimes exposure to the feared object—in very small amounts—helps "inoculate" the child against it. This is the technique called desensitization when it is used by professionals in therapy. For instance, a little girl who had terrifying nightmares about policemen as villains was taken by her father to visit the police station. She met the captain, toured the barracks, and talked with several patrolmen.

Although the experience wasn't fun for her, she later felt it helped her overcome her phobia. Likewise, a boy who had terrifying nightmares about fire engines following an actual fire, benefited from a trip to the fire station. It is very important not to overwhelm the child with the thing that evokes fear. Present the feared stimulus a little at a time. For some children, therapy might be required.

Read relevant stories.

Read stories to the child that provide a model of success in dealing with a source of fear similar to the one in the child's nightmare.

Provide appropriate toys.

Toys that suggest the nightmare content give the child an opportunity to act out fantasies. Playing out the dream can help a child practice more satisfactory conclusions.

The “anti-monster gun.” Parents contrive clever ways to help their children overcome nightmares. A five-year-old boy had occasional monster dreams that became troublesome. His mother bought him a special flashlight shaped like a gun. When the trigger was pulled a beam of light “shot” out. Proclaiming the flashlight an anti-monster gun, his mother suggested it might help solve his nightmares.

Soon the boy reported, “I know that monsters are all in your head, but I feel a lot safer since I got my anti-monster gun.” I have seen cans of spray that are labeled “Nightmare preventer” in toy stores. Suggestion works in many forms. Giving children confidence in themselves is crucial to conquering nightmares.

Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim provided flashlights of all sizes and shapes—the larger the better—to the emotionally disturbed children at the University of Chicago school where he was principal. He recommended flashlights as highly desirable toys for all children because of their form (phallic) and their ability to penetrate the dark. Parents may also find that flashlights provide their children with a useful defense against dream villains.

Nightmare Emergency: Falling

Description	Child reports falling through the air, frightened; child may or may not strike the ground in the dream. Note that falling dreams sometimes occur in conjunction with an actual fall from bed. For instance, children have fallen out of bed to the accompaniment of dreams about: falling down a mountain; a small plane falling from the sky; falling off the Empire State Building; being in a rocket that took off in space.
Frequency	Everybody has this dream at least once; common, yet a child does not dream of falling very often.
Usual meanings	“I feel insecure”; “I have no emotional support”; “I have no solid grounding” “I’ve lost ground”; or literally, “I am falling.”

First Aid

1. *Describe the dream.*

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. *Reflect the child's feeling.*

If child has spontaneously mentioned him or her emotions during the dream, reflect them. If not, ask about them. Comment as appropriate.

Did you feel different when...(there was a change in the dream)?

What was the worst part?

How did you feel?

You felt scared.

You felt unsupported.

You felt helpless.

3. *Express reassurance.*

Many children have that dream.

I used to have that dream; I sometimes dream that (if true).

Most people don't know you can change the dream.

4. *Align allies; take action.*

Strange as it may seem, falling can be a very good dream.

Remember the adventures Alice had in Wonderland when she fell down the rabbit hole?

Well, some people in a country very far away tell their children "Falling is one of the best dreams you can have." They say "the earth spirits love you; they are calling you."

When you dream of falling, relax; let yourself fall gently and land gently.

Go and find the wonderful things that are waiting for you there. You can see the different people or animals, learn their songs and dances, their masks and costumes, and bring them back to share with us.

Better yet, next time you have the dream of falling, fly.

Turn the passive falling into active flying.

Fly someplace interesting and learn something.

Remember what you discover and tell me about it when you wake up.

You know, it is safe to strike the bottom in a dream. (People are often alarmed from hearing the old tale that if you hit the ground in a dream you will die. This is simply not true; I have hit ground in many dreams, and so have numerous people I know. Thinking that it might be true, of course, adds to the

panic of a falling dream.)

If you could have anything you want happen in that dream—and you can—what would you choose?

How else would you change the dream of falling?

(If based on an actual fall) Maybe you are remembering when... How can we prevent that happening again? Be sure the child's sleeping area is cushioned and free of hard things, to prevent injury.

Remember, next time you have a dream like that, fall gently and land gently, or else fly.

Find something interesting and remember it.

Sample Solutions

An eleven-year-old boy dreamed of running, tripping over a stick, and falling over a cliff. He was “going down and down and down” and was almost about to hit the rocks, when he thought of changing the dream. He lifted his body up and started flying. He flew over the house he had just left. Birds started following him and talking and imitating him. He didn't understand the birds but followed them as they flew forward. Two eagles joined the group and they all flew and did tricks together. Then an airplane appeared and the boy became concerned he would hit it and woke up.

Although the boy's dream had a negative element enter at the end, he succeeded in pulling himself out of a free fall and was able to fly. In a “redream,” he could deal with the airplane as well. When I asked the child whether it was scary flying, he replied, “No, I just did it. It was free, like a bird.”

A second-grade girl also had a positive dream about falling; in it, she fell through a gutter where she discovered diamonds and other precious jewels at the bottom.

5. *Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.*

You had such a good idea last night (or whenever) about how to deal with that falling dream.

Would you draw me a picture of that dream?

How would that dream look with the better ending? (if child did not spontaneously include it).

You can change that picture or draw a new one.

Why don't you (or we) make up a poem or story about that dream adventure?

A thirteen-year-old girl told me her worst nightmare occurred when she was nine or ten. In the original dream, she opened a door, walked, slipped, and fell into “totally nothing, just space, pitch dark.” In her redream, the girl drew a gigantic cushion to catch her and break her fall. Such exercises help the child realize he or she has options within a bad dream.

6. Seek a long term solution.

Read stories that provide a positive model.

Read, or paraphrase for the very young child, stories that have to do with falling, where the hero or heroine has an adventure, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Tell the myth of Antaeus, who grew stronger each time he hit the ground. Stories about flying heroes and heroines, *Peter Pan*, the winged horse Pegasus, and so on, may encourage your child to convert dreams of falling into flying dreams.

Note of caution: If your child begins to dream of flying, or does so spontaneously, be sure that he or she understands that people can only fly in dreams (unless they have special equipment or machines). James Barrie was obliged to add to his class play of *Peter Pan* that "... no one can fly unless fairy dust has been blown on him," after several children had been hurt trying to fly from their beds.

Provide toys with wings.

Airplanes, winged animals, angel dolls and so forth, may be useful in playing out dreams of falling with better endings, and also to practice flying for future dreams.

Reassure yourself that dreams about falling are usually not worrisome.

Unless the child has a phobia about height, has had a traumatic fall, suffers from vertigo, or has some other balance problem, professional treatment is not needed. Freud thought that falling dreams were memories of being tossed in the air and caught by playful parents. They are often related to startling experiences of falling from bed, memories of a fall, or are associated with the sense of "falling" asleep.

Nightmare Emergency: Injury or Death

Description	Child reports that he or she, or another character (usually a loved one) was injured, killed or died. The cause is accidental: "I broke my leg"; "I got sick"; "My mother died": "There was a car accident and the child was killed": "My body expanded"; "I shrank"; "I was a baseball and people hit me"; "I was an eraser and people used me": "My head fell off and rolled away"; "My pet died" (fact or fiction), and so forth. In no case is a dream villain specified; the injury or death just happens.
Frequency	Many people have this dream fairly often. Moderately frequent in children. Dreams of injury or death sometimes occur at the onset of an actual illness, such as a fever.
Usual meanings	"I feel hurt"; "I feel damaged"; "I fear I will be hurt." (This dream is sometimes a warning about physical risk taking.) "I wish that person would go away" (rare). May

also mean “I am afraid I will lose that person.”

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

If the child has spontaneously mentioned emotions during the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.
How did you feel?
Did you feel different when...(a change in the dream occurred)?
What was the very worst part?
You felt scared.
You felt hurt.
You felt sad.
You felt helpless.
You felt puzzled.
The worst part was when...

3. Express reassurance

Sometimes people have dreams like that.
I know you are relieved it didn't happen in waking life.
That must have felt weird.
(If based on actual event) I felt sad, too, about the death—or injury—of
X (a specific person). Maybe you are remembering when...
We can't change what happened, but you can change your dream.

4. Align allies; take action.

What could you do if that actually happened? (Call a doctor, get an ambulance, stick the arm back on until it can be reattached, take the medicine, have an operation, and so on.)
You know, dreams are magical; you can do anything in them.
What could you do to make that dream better? (Have a miracle; put the head back in place, and so forth.)
You can get someone to help you in the dream.
Who could you get? Who is strong?
Is there a potion or medicine you could take for a cure? An operation?
Why don't you invent a “dream doctor” who can help you in emergencies?

In dreams you don't have to stay hurt; you don't have to let someone remain dead.
You can be reborn stronger than ever.
Come back to life.
Get a dream friend to teach you how to be extra healthy in your dreams.
Sometimes dreams give us a chance to say something we still need to say to a person who has really died. Is there anything you want to say to X (a person who is dead)? If you have that dream again, tell him/her.
Sometime we can learn something important in a dream from a person who has died.
If you have that dream again, ask the dream figure if he or she has anything to tell you.
Sometimes dreams can warn us about taking more care. Is there anything you need to be more careful about while you are awake?
Once in a great while we know in our dreams that we are getting sick before it happens in waking life. (Only if child becomes sick) It looks like your dreams were telling you that you might be unwell.

Sample Solutions

An eleven-year-old girl dreamed that her girl friend was killed in a car crash, but later the friend appeared alive and well; an eight-year-old girl dreamed that her pet dog returned from the dead to play with her; an eight-year-old boy dreamed that his deceased grandmother came back from heaven to sing his favorite song to him. Such dreams can bring the child much comfort.

5. Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.

That was a good idea you had about how to cope with the dream of...(yourself or X getting hurt or dying).
Please draw a picture of the dream.
Now show me how the dream would look with the different ending.
You can change the dream picture or draw a new one.
Could you make up a story about the dream experience?

An eight-year-old boy dreamed he was hiking up a hill. He did not see a hole that was eight feet deep, and he fell into it. "I had to stay in there a week, eating dirt," he told me. He explained that during the day of the dream he had actually tripped and hurt his ankle; he had to wear an ice pack. In this boy's case, his dreaming mind was picking up sensations of pain in the ankle and weaving them into a story. When the boy "redreamed" this episode of being trapped, he had someone come along with a ladder to help him climb

out. Although this did not alleviate the child's ankle pain, it may have eased his discomfort over feeling hurt and trapped in the dream. It helped him to practice active coping with life.

Later on, the child may be able to apply the same technique within the dream. The boy later told me with pleasure, "Hey, it's true—what you said yesterday about changing dreams. Last night I was at a May fair. And then my mom said, 'Come on, you have to go home.' I thought in my mind, 'No you don't have to, it's a dream.' I stayed and played. I came home by myself. It's kind of fun!"

6. Seek a long term solution.

Read relevant stories.

Read the child stories about children who overcome personal injury or who cope with death, as appropriate. True stories of survivors can be inspiring; provide a model of success.

Provide appropriate toys.

Toys to make available might include doctor and nurse dolls, and a physician's kit.

Teach appropriate skills.

Children who engage in waking activities relevant to the desired change in their dream may find that the new information and new skills carry over to their dream states. A woman who had recurrent dreams of being hurt at the bottom of a ravine was taught mountain-climbing skills while awake until she could remember them in her sleep. Eventually she dreamed of calling to her husband who threw her a long rope by which she pulled herself to safe ground.

When a child is actually ill or dying, dreams about this topic are to be expected. However, when children who are physically well dream often about being distorted, maimed, sick, or dying, or these things happening to other dream characters, they may benefit from therapy.

Nightmare Emergency: Kidnapped

Description	Child reports that he or she was kidnapped or stolen by people or animals, or someone tried to kidnap the child. Another child in the dream, with whom the child identifies, may be snatched away. Kidnapping dreams are a variation of chase or attack nightmares, so that section might be helpful as well.
Frequency	Few children dream of being kidnapped, although those who do so may have the dream often.

Usual meanings “I feel afraid and insecure about my position”; in rare cases, “I wish someone would get me out of here.”

Parents should be aware that a staggering number of children are reported missing or stolen each year: 1.8 million in the United States alone, that is, 4,932 every day. At least 313,000 of these kidnappings are estimated to be by one of the parents, usually estranged. From 6,000 to 50,000 are said to be abductions by strangers. It is a crisis, and frequently a tragedy, for all concerned.

Our children are bound to hear about sensationalized cases in the newspaper and on television; they respond anxiously to such reports. Parents need to alert children to avoid danger while still providing confidence in a secure home life. Mothers and fathers must exercise care in public, especially at shopping centers and by not leaving children in unattended cars—these are the locales of numerous incidents of child abduction. Caution and confidence is a tricky but desirable balance to convey to a child.

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did the dream end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

If the child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.
How did you feel?
What was the worst part?
Did you feel different when...(there was a change in the dream)?
You felt scared.
You felt helpless.
The worst part was...(there was nothing you could do, you were alone, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Sometimes people have dreams like that.
It can be very upsetting.
I'm sure you're glad it didn't happen in the waking world.
Most people don't know that you don't have to let bad things happen in a dream; you can change it.
(If child was actually kidnapped in the past) I know it's frightening to

remember what happened. Sometimes you feel afraid it will happen again. So do I.

We can't change what happened in the past, but you don't have to let it happen in a dream.

You can make the dream ending different; you can change it.

4. Align allies; take action.

Suppose you could do anything you want in a dream—and you can—what would you do?

How could you make the dream better?

What way would you change it?

Who could help you? Who is strong?

If that actually happened to you, what could you do?

(Call the police or a parent at the first opportunity, pass a note for help to someone, run away from the kidnapper, tell a person that you've been kidnapped, to call the police.)

In a dream, you could make the kidnappers apologize and return you to your home.

You could get help.

You could fight them and win.

Sample Solutions

A six-year-old girl dreamed she was held by kidnappers in a car. They drove to a city where, from the car, she saw a friend of her mother's in front of a house. The girl unlocked the car door. The lady driving it locked it again. The girl unlocked it once more and opened the door. The kidnappers tried to pull her back in, but she got away and went to her mother's friend's house where she found her mom.

It is very important for children to realize they can take action in dreams, as this little girl did, to get free.

5. Make a drawing or another creative product from the dream.

Have the child draw the "redream."

Could you make up a story about the experience?

Drawing and writing about a nightmare helps the child realize he or she has options; it also desensitizes the child to the fear the dream generated.

6. Seek long term solutions.

Children who have actually been kidnapped or stolen and abused require psychological or psychiatric treatment to help heal the inevitable emotional wounds from the experience.

Children who have not been kidnapped, yet dream about it often, need to feel more secure. The theme of being kidnapped often appears in children's dreams during and following parents' divorce; also just prior to or after the birth of a sibling. Parents need to provide loving attention and otherwise increase the child's confidence. If this dream theme does not abate, counseling may be beneficial.

Provide appropriate models.

Read the child stories in which a child hero or heroine overcomes being stolen or kidnapped. Being abducted is a classic fairy tale theme. The victim in stories, however, almost always triumphs in the end. Although reading stories about kidnapping may make the child more afraid, in fact, providing models of successful confrontation of fear are far more therapeutic than avoiding the problem.

Teach survival skills.

Make sure children know their full name, telephone number, and address, as well as various means of obtaining help if they are ever in such a distressing situation.

Nightmare Emergency: Being Lost

Description	Child reports that he or she was lost and felt desperate. Locale varies; may be outside in a forest, in city streets, in a maze, or inside a large building going down hallways or from room to room.
Frequency	Few children have this dream. Those that do may be plagued with it often. Dreams of being lost may be based on actual experience. If not, they are serious indicators of emotional turmoil.
Usual meanings	"I am confused"; "I feel helpless and alone"; "I am in despair"; "I feel deserted."

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
 What happened?
 What happened next?
 What did you do?
 How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)

How did you feel?

What was the worse part?

Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?

You felt scared.

You felt confused.

You felt helpless.

The worst part was... (feeling lost, being alone, no one would help).

3. *Express reassurance.*

Sometimes people have dreams like that.

It can be upsetting.

I'm sure you're glad it didn't happen in waking life.

You know, you don't have to stay lost in a dream.

You can change the dream.

(If child had an experience of being lost in waking life) Sometimes you feel afraid it will happen again. So do I. We can't change what happened then, but you can change a dream about being lost.

4. *Align allies; take action.*

Suppose that actually happened to you while awake?

What could you do?

What else?

Remember Hansel and Gretel? They tried to find their way back home with a trail of breadcrumbs. What would have been better? (In one version, Hansel and Gretel use stones to mark a trail)

(If child was actually lost) You felt terrible when that happened.

Sometimes you feel the same way again.

What did you do when you were lost?

What else could you have done?

Who could help you?

Who is strong?

We have magical powers in dreams, and we can make things happen.

Get help.

It's your dream; you can have anything you want happen.

What could you do?

What could be fun?

Try wandering to an interesting place; discover something; learn something and bring it back to the waking world.

If you ever have that dream again, be sure to try some of these things.

Sample Solution

A seven-year-old girl dreamed she was lost in the forest because she was angry. She might have reached in her pocket and found a map; she might have met a friendly rabbit that led her out; or she might have stopped, calmed herself and then retraced her route.

5. Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.

Could you show me what that dream looked like in a drawing?
 Now show me how the dream would look with a better ending.
 Could you make up a story about this dream experience?
 (Be sure to give any dream “discoveries” waking form and display them in a prominent place.)

6. Seek a long term solution.

Children who often dream of being lost may need professional assistance. The dream may occur during an isolated period of confusion or may represent a permanent attitude.

Provide successful models

Read stories to the child in which the hero or heroine overcomes being lost or profits from the experience. As in the fairy tale of “Hansel and Gretel,” being lost is another classic myth and folktale theme. Symbolically, it represents confusion prior to enlightenment.

A child’s version of the myth of Ariadne and Theseus is useful when a person dreams of being lost. Ariadne, remember, provided the thread that enabled Theseus to find his way out of the labyrinth that housed the minotaur—a monstrous half bull-half man who attacked anyone in his space.

Other tales involve people finding their way by marking trees, and so forth.

Teach survival skills.

Child should know his or her last name, address, telephone number, and so forth. Investigate methods boy scouts and girl scouts use to find their way in the wilderness; convey these to a child who has dreamed about being lost. You might want to supply the child with an inexpensive compass and teach them how to follow directions.

Nightmare Emergency: House on Fire

Description	Child reports that a house (or other building) was on fire; child was afraid. This nightmare may include efforts to escape or to save others.
Frequency	Few children have dreams about houses on fire; those who do tend to dream about this theme often.

Usual meanings “I am frightened by anger” (child’s own anger or that of someone else); (with older child) “I am afraid of sexual arousal”; “I am consumed” (with anger or passion); “I am out of control”; (rarely) “I am naughty” (playing with fire).

Dreams about fire may be based on the factual experience of a small or large fire, or even from being started by loud fire sirens. For adults, dreams about houses on fire often allude to sexual arousal. Of course, they sometimes express destructive anger. For those people involved in meditation, fire may be regarded as a symbol of purification.

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child’s feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)
How did you feel?
What was the worse part?
Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?
You felt scared.
You felt helpless.
The worst part was...(feeling helpless, toys destroyed fear of being burned, dying, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Sometimes people have dreams like that.
I’m sure you’re glad it didn’t happen in waking life.
It can still be frightening.
You know, you don’t have to let things burn up in a dream.
You can change the dream.
(If child had an experience of danger from fire in waking life)
Sometimes you feel afraid it will happen again. So do I. We

can't change what happened then, but you can change a dream about being in a fire.

4. Align allies; take action.

You know, in a dream you don't have to let that happen.
Suppose that actually happened in waking life?
What could you do? (Call the fire department, call 911 (emergency service), get a fire extinguisher, get water, sand, or a blanket to smother the flames, and so forth).
What do real firemen do?
In dreams we have magical powers.
Suppose you can do anything you want—and you can—in a dream, what would you do in this one?
Who could help you in such a situation?
Who is strong?
The next time you have that dream, get help; put out the fire.
Maybe you can find something wonderful in the ashes.
Build a new dream house, even better.

Sample Solution

An eight-year-old girl dreamed that her house was on fire and that her family had to jump out of the window. The y called the fire station and the firemen came. “And we had to buy a new house and new furniture.

This child was able to successfully call for help in her dream. The dream ending suggests that the fire may have been a means of getting rid of something unpleasant in order to start fresh with a new situation.

5. Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.

That was a good idea you had about coping with the fire in your dream.
Show me how that dream looked in a picture, would you?
How would your better ending look?
Could you make up a story about that dream?

A twelve-year-old girl dreamed that a teacher killed all the horses at Golden Gate stables by cutting their heads off, then setting the place on fire. The girl's dream probably reflected a feeling that her instinctual energy (represented by the horses) was being “cut off.” The fire in her dream portrays the girl's anger, as well as that the the teacher who did the cutting (an actual person).

In her redream, the girl drew one of the horses violently kicking and incapacitating the villain. By making such a drawing, the dreamer had a chance to express her anger in a harmless way, and so begin to defuse it.

6. Seek a long term solution.

Teach actual fire fighting skills.

Child should know what to do in a fire emergency (cut off the oxygen supply, crawl low under the smoke, cover mouth with wet cloth, and so forth). Remind the child that these skills can be used in dreams about fires as well. To make the child feel more secure, ensure that the house has adequate fire protection (an extinguisher, ladders, smoke detectors) and that the child knows how to find and use them.

Visit a fire station.

Talking with firemen and women and seeing their equipment can help alleviate fear about fires. In one study, this activity proved therapeutic to a little boy who had been terrified of fire sirens when his neighbor's house burned.

Provide relevant toys.

Fire engines, firefighters, and similar toys can help the child work out his or her fears in fantasy play.

Convey anger control

If anger is a problem for the child or adult—either in the form of uncontrolled rage or suppressed anger (so that the person is completely submissive), counseling may be desirable. People can learn more appropriate ways to channel feelings of anger, or, if needed, to become more assertive.

Nightmare Emergency: Vehicle Out of Control

Description	Child reports being in a car or other vehicle that is out of control. Circumstances vary: the vehicle may be going off the road, off a cliff, crashing into an object or person. The child may be the driver or a passenger, and may or may not attempt to regain control.
Frequency	Few children have dreams of being in vehicles out of control; those that do have the dream infrequently. This nightmare is much more common in adults.
Usual meanings:	“I have no control over what is happening”; “I feel frightened that things are out of my hands.” (If this nightmare is sometimes based on an accident with a car or other vehicle in waking life) “I still feel I can do nothing, the way I felt during the accident.”

First Aid*1. Describe the dream.*

- Tell me about it.
- What happened?
- What happened next?
- What did you do?

How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)

How did you feel?

What was the worse part?

Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?

You felt scared.

You felt helpless.

The worst part was...(when the car was about to crash, you knew you would die, you couldn't stop it, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Sometimes people have dreams like that.

I'm sure you're happy it didn't happen in the waking world.

Most people don't know we can do something about dreams of this kind.

(If based on actual experience) We can't change what happened, but you can change your dream about it.

4. Align allies; take action.

You know, in dreams we don't have to let bad things happen.

You can change your dream.

If that happened to you in waking life, it would be hard to deal with, but is there anything you could do to help? (Grab the wheel, wear seat belt, jump out of the car if it is not moving too fast.)

In dreams we can do anything.

Like magic, we can decide what we want and make it happen.

What could you do to make that dream change for the better?

Who could help you?

Who is strong?

What else could you do?

In dreams, you can drive the car by yourself.

Have an adventure.

Maybe you could turn the car into an airplane and fly.

Fly someplace interesting; see other children and what they do and remember so you can tell me about it.

If you ever have that dream again, remember the things you can do.

Inside the dream, remember that you have power to change it.

Make it better.

Sample Solutions

One man steered his car through the air and landed safely after going off a cliff in a dream; a girl who dreamed she was about to crash into a tree steered her dream car around it; a five-year-old boy who dreamed he went over a cliff in a car into water, turned his car into a submarine and drove away.

When a fourteen-year-old girl dreamed a crazy woman was at the steering wheel of a car she was riding in, she might have grabbed hold of the wheel herself or slammed on the brakes. She could have flown out of the wildly veering car, or somehow soothed the driver. Taking action in bad dreams helps a child to feel more capable not only in the dream, but also in tackling the waking situation the dream symbolizes.

5. Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.

What a good idea you had about how to cope with the crashing car in your dream.

Will you draw me a picture of that dream?

Show how it will look when you change the dream for the better.

Could you invent a story or poem about the dream?

6. Seek a long term solution.

Provide relevant toys.

Toy cars, trucks, and other vehicles are useful to act out the dream fantasy in play. Toy vehicles that children can safely drive themselves (such as scooters, tricycles, and go-carts) serve a similar purpose. Make sure the family car is safe. Use safety belts to protect the child.

Read relevant stories.

Reading the child stories that deal with the waking situation that makes the child feel out of control. There are many good children's books on changing schools, moving, divorce, death in the family, and so forth. Obviously, attending to the situation that is making the child feel insecure is desirable.

Get professional counseling if needed.

A child who has been traumatized in an actual accident may require help in overcoming the acquired fear.

Nightmare Emergency: Being Paralyzed or Stuck

Description Child reports that he or she was trapped, unable to move; the child may be unable to scream or breathe in the dream; may feel terrorized.

The circumstances vary: being buried alive; being caught

in something; being tied up; being barely able to run., with legs heavy as lead. The dream of being stuck or trapped may occur prior to or even just after awakening (sleep paralysis).

Frequency Few children report this dream; it does not occur often for those who do dream about being stuck or paralyzed. The dream can be a serious indicator of emotional turmoil. Sleep paralysis may have a physiological basis.

Usual meanings: “I feel trapped”; “I feel unable to make a move.” This dream is rarely based on an actual experience, although it may, if a child has been locked in a closet or chest, trapped in a cave-in, and so forth.

The dream may also be evoked by experiences of “sleep paralysis,” a condition in which the victim feels fully awake yet is unable to move. It usually occurs during the period of falling asleep or of waking up, and may endure for several minutes, sometimes accompanied by hallucinations. One type of sleep paralysis is caused by potassium depletion (needed for muscle contraction). It may be brought on by high intake of alcohol or high carbohydrate meals, and may occur in adolescent males. Other types of sleep paralysis are dominant inherited traits.

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)
How did you feel?
What was the worse part?
Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?
You felt scared.
You felt helpless.

You felt as though there was nothing you could do.

You felt trapped.

The worst part was... (when you realized you were stuck, when your legs felt heavy and you could barely move, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Sometimes people have this dream.

It can be quite alarming.

I'm sure you're happy it didn't happen in the waking world.

Most people don't know we can do something about dreams of this kind.

(If based on actual experience of being trapped) We can't change what happened, but you can change your dream about it.

4. Align allies; take action.

You know, you can change that dream.

It may seem impossible but you could get help.

Who could you get? Who is strong?

What could you do if you were actually trapped? (If tied up, could knock the telephone off the table, push buttons with the nose, call for help.

People who are actually paralyzed still can do things with their nose, mouth, or feet. Some of them paint pictures by holding the brush in their mouths; some write letters on a computer by moving their heads to activate it.

(If child says he or she tried to scream but couldn't make a sound) You don't need to yell to get help in a dream. Do it another way. Use ESP, send a message with your mind.

Cast a magic spell.

We can do anything in a dream if we remember to do it and want it hard enough.

If you can move your fingers, make a knife appear; cut the ropes; dream a ladder is near you to climb out of the pit; get a rope.

(If child had an episode of sleep paralysis) You can always move your eyes. Look around actively; look up, down, right, left, scan all over. Blink your eyes. Concentrate on moving your face; wriggle your nose or little finger. Once you move part of your body, the paralysis will be broken.

(If you are an adult who suffers from sleep paralysis, explain your condition to your bedmate and other family members. They can help you by speaking to you, or touching you lightly. Stimulation of the external body breaks the sensation of paralysis.)

Sample solution

A five-year-old boy dreamed he was tucked in a closet and couldn't get out. He was scared and thought nobody would save him, but then Superman appeared and carried him out.

5. *Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.*

That was a great idea you had about how to cope with being paralyzed/trapped in your dream.

Will you draw me a picture of the dream?

Show me how it will be when changed for the better.

Could you invent a poem or story about that dream?

A four-year-old boy dreamed he was screaming repeatedly for his mother without being able to make a sound. He could have redreamed that he “called” her with his mind and she heard him and rescued him. Under the direst dream circumstances it is always possible to fantasize a deliverance.

6. *Seek a long term solution.*

Read relevant stories.

Read stories to the child that portray the ability to escape from entrapping situations. People who have escaped from cave-ins provide a model of success. One man, whose wife dreamed often dreamed that she fell into a deep pit, taught her mountain climbing skills while she was awake. This resource helped her get out of the pits in her dreams.

Fairy tales like Sleeping Beauty may be helpful. She was immobilized for 100 years, but lived to marry her prince.

Consult pediatrician or counselor, as needed.

If your child suffers episodes of sleep paralysis you will want professional advice. You may also wish to research information about the condition at your local library, medical college, or on your home computer.

Obviously if your child has had a frightening waking experience with being trapped, you will want guidance in overcoming the fear resulting from it.

If your child has not had an episode of sleep paralysis, and has not been traumatically trapped in waking life, dreams about being trapped are a metaphor. What situation is making your child feel caught? The nightmare of being trapped or paralyzed may be a response to a temporary situation, but if such dreams persist, professional help is desirable.

Nightmare Emergency: Taking an Examination

Description	Child reports that he or she had to take a test at school; feelings of anxiety or frustration. There are many versions of the nightmare: the child cannot find the right room; the test has already begun; the questions are unfamiliar; child does not know answers; never read the required books; the time is up too soon; the child won't pass or graduate, and so forth.
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Frequency Bad dreams about taking tests are uncommon among American children; those who have them may dream about this topic periodically. American adults, however, have this dream fairly frequently, regardless of whether they graduated years earlier.

More children in cultures with extreme examination pressure, such as Japan and Great Britain, are likely to have this dream, and to experience it more often.

Usual meanings “I feel unprepared” (for any waking life situation); “I feel as if I am being ‘tested’ by some person or situation”; “I fear I will fail.” (If facing actual test) “I am concerned that I will not do well on the upcoming examination.”

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)
How did you feel?
What was the worse part?
Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?
You felt panicked.
You felt certain you would fail.
You felt helpless.
The worst part was...(when you couldn't find the room, when your time was up, when you realized you didn't know the answers, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Lots of people have this dream once in a while.
(If appropriate) People dream of this, especially if they have a test coming soon.
You still have time before the test; we'll talk about what can be done to prepare better.

Sometimes people have that dream when they feel they are being tested in some other area, like performing well in sports, or meeting an important person.

Most people don't know it's possible to change the dream.

4. Align allies; take action.

(If facing test) Sounds as though you might be worried about that upcoming exam.

What could we do to help you prepare better (Get up early; practice quiz; have parent drive child to school to allow more time.)

Sometimes this kind of dream, even though it's alarming, can help us practice for the real thing.

People sometimes dream the worst thing imaginable to prepare them; then the waking event can go more smoothly.

(If not facing test) Suppose you did have a big test, what could you do to get ready? (Study hard, get someone who knows the answers to help you practice, and so forth.)

You can do the same things in your dream.

It may seem impossible but you also could get supernatural help.

Who could you get? Who is wise? Who knows all the answers?

(Solomon, the encyclopedia, a wizard, a crystal ball, and so on.)

You can have anyone help you that you want in a dream.

Tuck them in your pocket.

Use a mental computer.

(For adults) Some situation must be making you feel "tested" at the moment. Do you know what it is?

Solving the situation in the dream will help prepare you to deal better with the waking situation.

(For children and adults) If you ever have that dream again, be sure to get some help. It's your dream and you can have it happen any way you want.

Sample Solution

A little boy who dreamed about trying desperately to answer his test questions when the bell went off might have had the teacher announce that the whole class could have a half hour extra. He could have dreamed of himself finishing his answers with each, and so practiced for his waking life trials. A magical creature could have handed him the answers all complete, just in time.

5. Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.

You had a good idea about coping with taking a test in your dream.

Will you draw me a picture of the dream?

Show me how it will be different with the better ending.

Could you make up a story or poem about that dream?

6. Seek a long term solution.

Provide successful models.

Stories in which a child succeeds in learning or discovering something that others have missed can inspire a need to achieve despite difficulties. The story of Champollion's deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics, for instance, shows how a childhood ambition can lead to significant accomplishments.

Provide relevant toys.

Playing school with dolls and small books can help children work out anxieties about test taking. You can also make games of learning and testing with computers.

Consult with professional, as needed.

To learn efficiently, some children require alternate forms of teaching to the usual visual approach, such as auditory and tactile methods. Reading specialists, tutors, and special schools can help.

Some very bright people experience "examination anxiety," a state of panic so severe that they are unable to function when tested. Such people can benefit from counseling or therapy, especially "desensitization," so that they can perform at their level of knowledge during testing.

Therapy may also be beneficial for people who feel "tested" by a great number of situations in their environment. They can be helped by building confidence in themselves and acquiring social skills.

***Nightmare Emergency: Monstrous Water:
Tidal Wave, Flood, Drowning***

Description	Child reports being confronted with overwhelming water, such as a flood, torrential rain, or a tidal wave. Child may say that he or she or some other dream character is drowning.
Frequency	Rare. Very few children have this dream; those who do may have it often. This nightmare may be an indicator of serious emotional turmoil. Adults have this dream more often than children.
Usual meanings	"I feel overwhelmed"; "I give up"; "Things are too much at the moment." In some cases, this nightmare is based on an experience of near drowning, or knowing someone who had such an experience. It may also occur in certain physical conditions when the body accumulates water. Heart patients and people with other conditions prone to edema could regard this dream as an indication of excess

fluid in the body, and should seek assistance accordingly.

First Aid

1. Describe the dream.

Tell me about it.
What happened?
What happened next?
What did you do?
How did it end?

2. Reflect the child's feeling.

(If child has spontaneously mentioned his or her emotions while describing the dream, reflect them. If not, elicit them. Comment as appropriate.)

How did you feel?

What was the worse part?

Did you feel differently when...(a change occurred in the dream)?

You felt overwhelmed.

You felt nothing could be done.

You felt helpless.

You felt scared.

The worst part was...(when you saw the tidal wave looming above you, when you were covered by water, when you realized you would drown, and so forth).

3. Express reassurance.

Once in a while people have dreams like this.

I'm sure you're glad it didn't happen in waking life.

Most people don't know that it's possible to change that frightening dream.

(If based on experience of someone know to the child) Sounds as if you are remembering when...(such and such happened to so and so).

(If based on child's experience choking in water or being thrown into deep water) Maybe you are remembering when (such and such) happened to you. We can't change what happened, but you can change your dream.

4. Align allies; take action.

In dreams, you can make things different.

You don't have to let the dream end like that.

Suppose there really was ... (a tidal wave, a flood).

What could you do? (Get a rowboat, use a board to float upon, climb a tree, get on top of the roof, and so forth.)

Who could help you? (A rescue team in a helicopter, the Red Cross, a lifeguard, and so on.)

You can get the same help in your dream.

People even have special powers in dreams, like magic.

If you could have anyone you want—and you can in a dream—who would you get to help you?

Who is strong?

What else could you do? (Fly away, get a scuba mask, climb in a submarine and get away, pretend to be Noah, meet Neptune).

Here's a special trick. In dreams, and only in dreams, it is possible to breathe underwater. Did you know that?

If you ever have that bad dream again, make it different, make it better.

Sample Solution

One woman who used to have dreams of being overwhelmed by tidal waves discovered that in her dreams she could breathe underwater. Elated, she taught her small daughter underwater breathing in the dream.

A twelve-year-old girl remembers her favorite dream was an underwater adventure where she went down into the sea on a turtle. They went to a palace where she met the queen, and another turtle who told the child her name and let her inside his shell. "It was beautiful!" she said.

5. *Make a drawing or some other creative product from the dream.*

That was a wonderful idea you had about how to cope with the tidal wave/flood/rainstorm in your dream.

Please draw me a picture of it.

Now show how the dream would look when you change it for the better.

Could you make up a poem or story about the dream?

Some of your child's dreams, even the worst nightmares, make charming drawings, the basis for a fantasy tale or a play. Deriving creative products from their dreams helps children develop their imagination in constructive ways. Be sure to give any dream products your child makes a prominent display.

6. *Seek a long term solution.*

Provide information, as needed.

If your child has a waking fear of water, swimming lessons with an understanding teacher can help. Water games in shallow water may be useful. You need to exercise care in overcoming traumatic experience with water. If the child has had an episode of near drowning, professional care

may be desirable.

If you live in an area where there is ongoing danger of flooding or tidal waves, discuss with your child practical ways to deal with the danger (When you hear the siren, do such and such; You know we have plenty of emergency supplies in case that happens.)

Find out how lifeguards save people. If not already familiar with these techniques, investigate life saving procedures in water. The Boy Scout manual has a good summary. Learn how to restore breathing when a person has swallowed water. Teach these to the child if old enough, and explain how standard lifesaving ideas can be used in dreams as well as while awake.

If your child has a physical condition that creates edema (water retention), dreams about excessive flooding and so forth may indicate a worsening of the condition. Consult your physician. Regardless of physical condition, it's good to teach your child to actively overcome the water in his or her dream.

Provide models of water adventures.

Reading your child stories of adventures in water, such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*; *Robinson Crusoe*; *Swiss Family Robinson*, and so forth, may convey a more positive approach to water. Include models of success in coping with storms, floods, and tidal waves. The story of Noah's Ark is classic.

Provide relevant toys.

Boats and other sorts of water toys help a child practice coping with this or her fear of water during play.

Remember that your purpose is to empower your child to take action and succeed in a dream. This success helps the child not only cope with nightmares but also teaches lessons in daily living. Children learn that what they do makes a difference, that they have many options when faced with a problem, and that their imagination can help them solve it. They learn new ways of looking at frightening situations, and how to turn these into something worthwhile. The drawing or poem or story that is produced is not so important as the child's realization that he or she has the power to make life better.