



Jane Seymour,
Marilu Henner
and Tracey Ullman*
tackle your toughest
parenting
questions

Bedtime is nonexistent in my house. We fight and scream, but no matter what I do my seven-year-old son won't go to bed. Any suggestions?

Tracey Ever heard of being firm with your kid? Tell him that you're the boss and what you say goes until he's 18. Or am I just being too British here? Would that kind of talk traumatize the little muffin? (Americans call their children muffins or peanuts, by the way, while English people call them buttons or sausages. Thought you might like to hear about the differences in child-food association between our two countries.) Nothing wrong with being too British with the little ones, by the way. Do you think Jane and Michael would have given Mary Poppins the slightest bit of trouble at bedtime? Not bloomin' likely!

Marilu Every family has a bedtime ritual, and yours is no exception. The only problem is that your routine involves fighting. Children are very smart, and your son knows he has you. This is his ritual, and he is setting the rules. What you have to do is break this ritual by becoming the parent again. Set your rules and stick with them, no matter how your son screams and yells. Believe me, I speak from experience. Bedtime was a nightmare in my house until I established the "one tuck-in only" policy. If your son knows you mean business, you'll both enjoy lights-out more.

Jane Make a habit of reading a book at night. Maybe watch 20 minutes of a movie and play some music. Then keep a chart with incentive gifts or rewards for going to bed without screams. Kids look for limits—forever. Good luck!

Although I've tried everything I can possibly think of, my 13-month-old son won't eat. Every time he refuses food, I'm worried that he'll starve!

Tracey Offer him a smorgasbord of finger food to touch, smell, squish and throw. Yellow food works best—bananas, pasta and vanilla pudding. My daughter was finicky to distraction, and by the time she was three, I had had enough. I gave her a mini cart and let her do her own shopping, for herself and a family of Barbies. Her choices were surprisingly good, and I realized that this was the way to treat a miniature control freak.

Marilu Not only can your child eat many of the things you do (cut up into small pieces, of course), but he's now old enough to feed himself. That will help him establish his own rhythm and timing for being hungry. Make sure that what you put in front of him is healthy. The quality will make up for the quantity. And remember—a child's palate is purer and less desensitized than an adult's. In other words, just because your son's food doesn't taste flavorful enough to you, that doesn't mean your child won't like it. ▶



LaTanya Richardson,
Pat Benatar and
Nana Visitor* tackle
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My daughter cries and screams whenever I drop her off at child care. It's been going on for nearly six months now, and I don't know what to do. Any ideas?

LaTanya Talk to the primary caretakers and see what their take on her behavior is; perhaps she's not crying for an abnormal length of time once you leave. They may even have suggestions for ways to approach the drive to the facility, like playing a game or singing a song that makes her stay at the child-care center seem like a playdate. You could also consult some other parents who've had similar experiences. Finally, before you go, say a little prayer with her, emphasizing that angels will watch over her until you return.

Pat Oh, I hate it when that happens! When my oldest daughter, Haley, was in preschool, I used to literally peel her fingers off my leg when I said goodbye. She was crying, I was crying. (I still can't smell finger paint without getting anxious.) Separation is very difficult for small children because they can't grasp the concept of time, and they haven't learned that they're not being abandoned forever every time Mom and Dad leave. Try giving your daughter something familiar of yours or her dad's to hold if she's feeling scared. And reassure her that you'll be back. (With older children, you can show them the time on a clock.)

Nana When this happened to my first son, Buster, I realized I was setting the mood for an operatic goodbye scene at school. Totally unaware, I would send little signals—like worried looks and pleas for him to “be okay” this time—that something potentially difficult was about to happen. Eventually, I broke the habit by behaving matter-of-factly and making sure that the last thing we talked about before I left would be plans for when I would pick him up. Once my attitude changed, his quickly followed.

I'm pregnant, and everyone is hounding my husband and me about the sex and name of the baby. How can we tactfully ask friends and relatives to leave us alone?

LaTanya I can't believe you are even asking this question! How about, “Mind your own business”? But if you are a scaredy-cat, say something like, “My husband and I believe that babies are a gift from God, and as with any other present, we don't want to open it until it's time.” (And then say, “Mind your own business.”)

Pat It's always amazing to me how bold people are today. They'll ask you the most personal things about your life or, worse, tell you the most personal things about theirs. By and large, I think most people mean well. However, you have a right to your privacy. Tell them kindly that you and your husband are not planning to find out the sex of the child ahead of time and that you haven't decided on a name. They should back off. ▶