

Your child walks, talks, screams or moves while asleep

SLEEP CENTER

Any unusual behavior during sleep is called a “**Parasomnia**”. It is helpful to keep track of the **timing** of the behaviors and if **your child remembers** any of the experience.

If your child’s behaviors happen most often in the **first** half of the night (after they fall asleep before 1 or 2am), they could be:

- **Sleep talking**
- **Eating while asleep**
- **Sleep walking**
 - Walking with eyes open, usually calm
 - Can talk or mutter things, sometimes using bad words
 - Can perform simple tasks like trying to get dressed, opening drawers or doors, going to the bathroom, eating
 - Can lay down to sleep in the wrong place
- **Confusional arousals**
 - Sit up suddenly and look awake but confused, not scared
 - Usually do not walk or get out of bed, can talk
 - Can try to eat or smack lips/jaws
- **Sleep terrors or night terrors**
 - Sudden episodes starting with a cry or scream
 - Eyes open, shaking, sweaty, look very scared, can run
 - Act confused or disoriented, can cry inconsolably

How long should this last?

- No longer than **30 minutes** (It will last longer if you try to wake them up)
- Usually only **once** per night
- Can happen in clusters of nights in a row and then not again for months

What can be done about these behaviors?

1. Make sure your child is **safe**: baby-proof stairs and doors to the outside, prevent falls
2. Do not panic. Although this is scary, these behaviors should stop and your child **will not** remember these events.
3. Wait for the behaviors to stop and calmly walk your child back to bed
4. Avoid **triggers** for these events such as:
 - a. Being overtired: make sure your child is getting enough sleep every day
 - b. Fever
 - c. Full bladder
 - d. Anxiety or emotional stress

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If your child's behaviors happen most often in the *second* half of the night (after 2am), they could be:

➤ Nightmares

- Sudden episode starting with a cry or scream
- Can talk or mutter things, sometimes using bad words
- Usually not confused or disoriented once awake
- No movements while asleep

What to do during a nightmare?

1. Get to your child quickly and talk them through their feelings, reassure them they are safe
2. Reassure them it was only a dream and dreams are not real
3. Let them leave a light on if that keeps them calm enough to fall asleep again
4. Ask what the dream was about to see if there is a shadow or something in the room you can fix to avoid scaring your child again
5. Wait for them to feel ready to fall back asleep again

➤ Movements while dreaming

- It appears your child is acting out a dream
- Can run, move, play, attempt to do complicated things including dress or urinate
- Your child will remember the dream in the morning
- Not usually scared
- Can fall or hurt themselves if get out of bed

What to do if your child is acting out a dream?

Making sure your child is **safe**. This may require having the mattress on the floor or pillows below the bed in case of a fall. Ensure there is a gate in front of all stairs and that your child does not have access to the outside. Anchor furniture and televisions into the wall or in safe places that can't fall onto your child if pulled.