

The Column for Parents

This month Juliet Platt and Catherine Albert of ParentZone talk about bedtime routines for young children on light nights, and we hear from a teenager who got their own way with a body-piercing!

My five-year old daughter is taking ages to settle at night and keeps protesting that she doesn't want to go to sleep as it's 'still morning'.

It's lovely when the days get longer and the weather begins to improve, but for parents with young children leisurely evenings sitting outdoors and watching the sun go down seem like a distant dream!

It's difficult to get children settled at their regular bedtime when the birds are still singing. Being tucked up in bed when the evening is still warm can feel doubly uncomfortable too. We can help our children feel happier about going to bed during light nights by being a bit more flexible with their normal routine.

According to parenting expert Dr Pat Spungin, typical sleep patterns for children between the ages of five and twelve years are between 11 and 9.25 hours a night. So if your child is protesting at a 7pm bedtime on a week night it may be OK to allow them to stay up a bit later and still not compromise on the amount of sleep they actually need.

Take advantage of the extra daylight and fine weather to get them outdoors more – playing in the garden or going for a walk or cycle ride together after tea can help them burn off a bit more energy before bedtime. If you join in you can help them create happy summertime memories too.

Light some outdoor lanterns to create a cosy and magical corner for a bedtime story in the garden, or see who can spot the first twinkling star or evening bat flapping around. Younger children might also be told that they need to be in bed before the birds as it's their job to sing sleepy children a lullaby!

Light nights needn't be a battle. With a bit of imagination and flexibility it can be a time that we all look forwards to.

A Link reader sent this advice:

"My teenage daughter wanted to have a body-piercing but I was dead against it and told her no. I was worried about how much it would hurt, about the possible side-effects and whether she'd ultimately regret having it done.

"I was shocked at how upset she got about it. She's not one to slam doors and shout, but for a couple of days she did little else but sit in her room crying.

"When I went to talk to her about it I started to realise how much it meant to her. But the thing that really persuaded me and her Dad to give in was what she said next.

"She told us that being sixteen it would have been easy for her to take her Citizen Card as proof of her age and have it done anyway even without our blessing, but she hadn't done that because she didn't want to upset us.

"Listening to her make her case we realised that she was right and that by not giving our permission we were achieving nothing but making our daughter unhappy. Even though it was hard for us to give in initially we did in the end because we could see how much it meant to her."

The teen in question tells us:

"I had always wanted a body-piercing, ever since I was younger. I had always liked the thought. So when I finally asked I was very upset when they said no. I felt like they didn't understand my point of view and thought of me as not responsible enough for my own body.

"So after a while of being upset and fed up of being treated like a child, I decided what I was going to say in order to argue my case.

"I told them how I felt and how I could have just gone and done it anyway but knew that that would leave me with less respect than the little I felt I had. So in the end they agreed and I thought I had gone about it the best way."

Write to Juliet@treetopscoaching.com with your questions, thoughts and experiences of parenting. We are always on the lookout for different ideas, hints and tips for how to improve things for ourselves and our children.