



Case study

Adelle, 9 years old:

A case of saving a family from depression and burnout

Background and key challenges:

Adelle's family is very busy and everybody lives life to the full. Her father, an architect travels abroad for his work very frequently. During that time, her mother, a self employed PA has to deal with two children, a house to run and a demanding job. At 9 years old, Adelle was doing well in all aspects of her life, but night times were dramatic. Every night, Adelle would go to sleep as expected, but wake up consistently throughout the night and would need help to get back to sleep. Regularly, she would end up in her parents bed, with no recollection in the morning of how she got there. Over the years, difficulties had gradually escalated and "old techniques didn't work anymore". Full-on arguments regularly exploded at night. Everybody was exhausted and lived in fear of the night. Parents could not think of a way out of this traumatic situation. Adelle was getting increasingly self conscious and depressed about her difficulties to sleep.

Problems:

- A need of noise or body contact to fall asleep and stay asleep
- Unpredictable pattern of father's presence
- No awareness of her night movements

Aims and objectives:

- Empower Adelle to take charge of her sleep
- Reduce Adelle's anxiety during the night
- Teach her how to deal with night wakings
- Make her aware of her whereabouts
- Give parents coping techniques to remain calm at night, respectful and consistent

Solutions:

- Put in place some key parenting elements to provide consistency, predictability and emotional safety
- Explain to Adelle with age appropriate explanations, how sleep works and why she wakes up
- Teach Adelle to fall asleep unaided and without noise in the evening
- Teach Adelle a simple breathing technique to relax
- Show Adelle some paradoxical intention exercises to free her other-thinking mind
- Teach her some mindfulness exercises to realise when she is getting out of bed and help her make a conscious decision to get back to bed alone

Results:

- Over a few weeks, the parents learnt a lot about the technicalities of sleep
- Strategies were put in place to reduce Adelle's separation anxieties
- Parents learnt to be consistent
- Adelle learnt how sleeps works
- She regained confidence and learnt to put herself back to sleep when she wakes up
- Everybody regained sanity, avoided depression and arguments over sleep no longer happen
- Parents enjoy predictable evenings
- Adelle feels proud and made a presentation at school to explain to her school friends how sleep works

Prevention:

This situation could have been avoided by learning about key elements* before their daughter's seventh birthday:

- What happens when a child reaches the age of reasoning
- Growing up but not so grown-up: How to make a child feel secure
- How to instigate a respectful authority
- Secure attachment for school child
- The importance of behavioural and physical boundaries to a child's mental health

** All covered in the "school children" workshop*