



Things to Avoid Saying at Bedtime and What to Say Instead

Maddy Thompson
Balanced Bedtime sleep consultancy
Level 6 OCN Paediatric Sleep Practitioner
www.BalancedBedtime.co.uk



When you're exhausted and it's the tenth time you've walked someone back to bed, it's completely understandable that reassuring words don't always come easily. Most parents and carers have found themselves saying things they later wish they'd phrased differently.

Children who have experienced trauma often hear words very differently from adults. They are constantly asking themselves one question: "Am I safe with you?" The way we respond can either help their nervous system settle or unintentionally increase their distress.

Here are some common bedtime phrases to rethink

Instead of: "You're safe now."

Try: *"I'm here with you."*

or

"I'll keep checking on you."

or

"I'll help you if you need me."

For children who have experienced frightening or unpredictable events, being told they are safe doesn't automatically make them feel safe. Their brain may still be expecting danger. Rather than arguing with what they're feeling, offer your calm presence. Over time, consistent experiences of being cared for help children develop a genuine sense of security.

Instead of: "There's nothing to be scared of."

Try: *"You're not on your own."*

or

"I'm right here while your body settles."

Fear doesn't disappear simply because we explain that there's no danger. Acknowledging a child's feelings without reinforcing the fear helps them feel understood rather than dismissed. Feeling emotionally seen is an important part of building secure attachment.

Instead of: "You're fine."

Try: *"Let's see what might help you settle."*

or

"Let's work through it together."

Children often borrow emotional regulation from the adults caring for them. Naming their experience calmly shows that difficult feelings can be tolerated without becoming overwhelming.

Instead of: "Big boys/ girls don't cry." or "You're too old for this."

Try: *"Everyone needs support sometimes."*

or

"It's okay to need a cuddle."

Children don't become emotionally secure by being encouraged to suppress their feelings. They become emotionally secure because someone consistently responds with warmth, empathy and appropriate reassurance.

Instead of: "If you get out of bed again, I'll..."

Try: *"I'll help you back into bed each time."*

or

"If you come out of bed, I'll quietly help you back."

Clear, calm boundaries are important, but they don't need to be delivered with threats or frustration. A predictable, matter-of-fact response helps children know what to expect and gradually reduces uncertainty.

Instead of: "You should be asleep by now."

Try: "Let's keep things calm while your body gets ready for sleep."

or

"You can rest quietly. Sleep will come when you're ready."

or

"I'm here while you settle."

Children rarely choose not to sleep. When trauma has affected their nervous system, bedtime may simply take longer. Shifting our language away from blame helps us stay focused on supporting rather than correcting.

Instead of: "Go to sleep."

Try: "It's time to rest now."

or

"Just rest quietly. I'll check on you soon."

or

"You can snuggle down and get comfortable."

Sleep isn't something we can force. Reducing the pressure to fall asleep often lowers anxiety and allows sleep to come more naturally.

Remember

Every calm response, gentle hand on their head, time you quietly walked them back to bed without anger was teaching something much bigger than sleep. It was teaching them that there are adults that can be trusted, positive feelings that can be shared, and someone will still be there in the morning.

Need Personalised Support?

Every child's sleep journey is unique.

If you're struggling with bedtime battles, frequent night waking, short naps, or you're simply unsure whether your child's sleep needs are being met, I offer individual consultations to help you understand what's happening and create a sleep plan tailored to your child and family.



Maddy Thompson
Sleep Practitioner
Balanced Bedtime sleep consultancy

Phone: +44 7345 240195
Email: Maddy@BalancedBedtimeSC.co.uk
Instagram: [balancedbedtimesc](https://www.instagram.com/balancedbedtimesc)
Tiktok: [@balancedbedtimesc](https://www.tiktok.com/@balancedbedtimesc)

Social Worker & Level 6 OCN Paediatric Sleep Practitioner

www.BalancedBedtime.co.uk

