

A FIELD GUIDE FOR THE BEDTIME HOUR

Fix bedtime in 40 minutes.

Get your night back.



MARA HOLST • LAST HOUR PRESS

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This guide is not a substitute for medical, psychological, or developmental advice. Behavioral patterns described are common and observational, not diagnostic. If your child's sleep or behavior concerns you, please speak with your pediatrician.

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*For the parents on the bathroom floor at nine forty-seven,
with the door locked.*

You are doing this on hard mode.

It is not your imagination.

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A letter, before we begin

I wrote this on the other side of a year I do not want to repeat.

Two years ago, my older daughter and I were locked in something I did not have a name for. Bedtime started at six-fifty and ended around nine-fifteen, every night, for what felt like a season but was actually almost five months. I read four parenting books that fall. I bought the silk eye mask. I bought the white noise machine that turns the ceiling into stars. I tried the meditation app for kids with the cartoon whale. The whale made it worse.

I am not a sleep consultant. I am not a pediatrician. My only credential is that I survived this and I wrote it down because nobody wrote it down for me.

What you are holding is the structural fix that worked in my house and in seven friends' houses. It is not a sleep training method. It is not extinction-based. It is not a 5-step plan that tries to sound like a 5-step plan. It is forty minutes, broken into five eight-minute stretches, that you can run starting tonight, before you finish this guide, with whatever you already have in your house right now.

You are the parent of a person who is two, or three, or four. You are tired in a particular way that nobody warned you about. You are doing this on hard mode and it is not your imagination.

I am glad you are here.

Mara

How to use this guide

You do not have to read this in order. You bought it. It is yours.

The ten-minute path. Read the next chapter, “Read This Before You Do Anything Else.” Then flip to the script that matches your worst trigger moment. The scripts begin in Part Three. Use one tonight.

The full path. One chapter per night, in order, over five nights. Read it after the kids are down. Bring something hot to drink.

The worksheet path. Skip to Part Two. Fill them in tomorrow during nap or after lunch.

Permission slip. If you read only the next chapter and use one script tonight, that is enough. The rest is here for whenever you want it.

Read this before you do anything else

It is seven forty-three. You said “last book” twenty minutes ago.

They are negotiating. The baby monitor in the next room is already lit up because the baby heard the screaming. Your partner is “helping” by making it louder. You have not peed alone since Tuesday. You read the gentle parenting book that your sister sent. You did the connection. You named the feeling. They still threw the cup at your face.

You are not failing.

Your bedtime is running on a loop that was designed to fail.

THE SIX-QUESTION LOOP DIAGNOSTIC

Check every box that is true tonight.

☐ Bedtime takes longer than forty-five minutes from "let's go up" to asleep.

☐ You read more books than you said you would.

☐ There is a "one more" something. Song, hug, water, pee.

☐ You have left the room and been called back at least twice.

☐ You have threatened something you did not follow through on.

☐ You are reading this on your phone right now because you needed to hide.

If three or more feel familiar, you are the parent I wrote this for.

THE FRAMEWORK

Bedtime breaks in the forty minutes before the bedroom, not in the bedroom.

Fix the runway and the room becomes easy. Five stages. Eight minutes each.

0 → 8	8 → 16	16 → 24	24 → 32	32 → 40
The Drop	The Signal	The Body	The Container	The Exit
STIMULATION	ONE CUE	WIND-DOWN	THREE BOOKS	WALK OUT
FLOOR				

THE FORTY MINUTES BEFORE THE BEDROOM

TONIGHT’S QUICK WIN

Pick one thing to remove from tonight’s bedtime. Not add. Remove.

The lamp that is too bright. The TV in the next room. The third book. The “what did you do today” conversation that turns into a twelve-minute negotiation.

Just one.

Watch what happens.

You can read the rest of this tomorrow morning. Tonight, just remove one thing.

CHAPTER 1

Why bedtime got worse the harder you tried



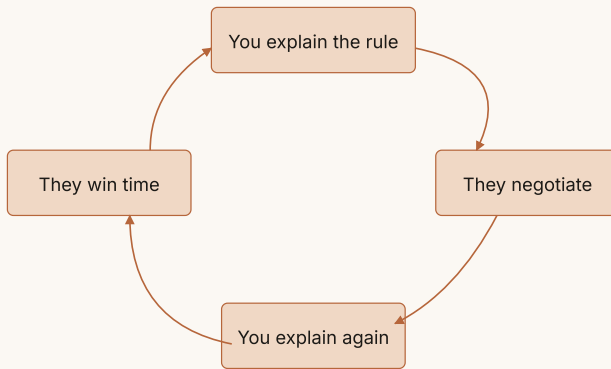
THE HARDER YOU TRY AT BEDTIME, THE WORSE IT GETS.

Not because effort is bad. Because the kind of effort gentle parenting taught you to bring at seven-thirty is the wrong kind for that hour.

At two in the afternoon, your toddler can hear the long sentence. “I see you are frustrated because we have to leave the park, and your body is telling you it wants to keep playing.” They can take that in. They can use it.

At seven-thirty, the same sentence is jet fuel. By seven-thirty they are running on fumes, and long sentences about feelings ask more of them than they have left. What they have left is the part that says MORE and NO and AGAIN.

When you bring big-feelings language into the forty minutes before bed, you are not soothing them. You are starting a conversation. Toddlers love conversations. Conversations are negotiations. Negotiations are how they stay up another forty-five minutes.



THE LOOP, EVERY NIGHT

WHAT THE BOOKS GOT RIGHT AND WHAT THEY DID NOT

Daytime: validate feelings, stay regulated, repair when you mess up. All of that holds.

What got lost in translation is that none of those tools were designed to be deployed in the forty minutes before sleep when both of you are tapped out.

A tired toddler does not need more words. They need fewer.

A tired parent does not need a more elaborate routine. They need a shorter one.

Quick win.

Tonight, say one fewer sentence at bedtime. Whatever you would normally say to explain or soothe or reason, cut it in half.

Script.

Replace “I know you really want one more book, and it is hard when something fun has to end, but we said three books and we already read three books, so now it is time to” with:

“Books are done. Lights off.”

Six words. That is it.
