



Purpose: The Bedtime Pass is used with young children (ages 3 to 10) who have a difficult time going to bed on their own. It's best used with children who do the following things after being put to bed: call out to parents (e.g., "Mom, I love you." "Can you come back in?"), cry or yell, or actually leave the room. This treatment is not likely to work well with younger or older children. Also, it may not be best for children who have lots of behavior problems at times other than bedtime. For these children, other things are probably needed first, before working on bedtime.

Steps: Using the Bedtime Pass is a multi-step process. Follow the guidelines below:

- 1) Sometime before bedtime on the night that you are to start the program, sit down with your child and explain the procedures. These are the important points to cover:
 - a. Explain that your child is having some difficulty going to sleep on his or her own and that you have come up with an idea of how to help. (e.g., "I know that it's hard for you to go to bed on your own. So, I've made up an idea that may help you.").
 - b. Explain the strategy. Say something like, "You and I are going to make a pass for you to use each and every night. You will get one pass per night. After mommy or daddy puts you to bed, you can use the pass for one free trip out of the room, for some purpose. The reason has to be short and to the point. For example, if you want one last hug or one last trip to the potty, that's fine. If you use your pass, then you need to give it to mommy or daddy and go straight back to bed." *Stress that it needs to be a short, specific reason (5 min or less).*
 - c. Explain what should happen after your child uses the pass. Say something like, "After you use your pass, you need to go back to bed and stay there for the rest of the night."
- 2) You and your child should now make the pass. You can use 3x5 or 5x7 note cards, thick cardboard cut out to about the size of a small photograph, or some similar material. If you used note cards, you might want to tape several together to make the pass sturdier. Allow your child to color, write on, or otherwise make the pass his/her "own."
- 3) Just before bed, hand your child the pass and remind him/her of its purpose. Follow your typical bedtime routine and then leave the room.
- 4) If your child requests to use the pass, allow this and then take the pass. Send your child back to bed, reminding him/her that it is now time to stay in there and be quiet.
- 5) If your child calls out AFTER using the pass, ignore this behavior. Even if s/he escalates, continue to ignore the behavior.
- 6) If your child comes out of the room AFTER using the pass, physically guide him/her back to bed with no/minimal interaction.
- 7) For the first few nights when you are using the pass, remind your child of the rules of using the pass, give him/her a pass, and follow the same routine.

Increasing the Success of the Pass: For many children, simply using the pass will be effective in decreasing bedtime behavior problems. Of course, you will want to verbally praise your child for using

the pass and for going to bed like a good boy or girl. For some children, the pass may result in some improvement, but not as much as you'd hoped for. In this situation, you may also need to add an extra incentive for using the pass. Examples might include:

- 1) Letting your child pick his or her breakfast (within reason, of course) on mornings after not having any bedtime behavior problems.
- 2) Offering an afternoon/after school treat when your child didn't call out or leave the room at all.
- 3) Providing an opportunity to reach into a grab bag with small treats each morning that there was no resistance.
- 4) For older children, you can make the rewards more long term, like staying up later on Friday if there was no or minimal bedtime resistance during the week.

Remember, if you are offering incentives; make sure that your child only gets them when there is no bedtime resistance. Also, think about providing more rewards at first, and then decreasing the rewards over time.

¹ This handout is based on the intervention described in Friman, P.C., Hoff, K.E., Schnoes, C., Freeman, K.A., Woods, D.W., & Blum, N. (1999). The bedtime pass: An approach to bedtime crying and leaving the room. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 153, 1027-1029.