



Graduated withdrawal or “the Disappearing chair”

A graduated withdrawal is often useful when there is anxiety around bedtime and a child wants a parent/carer in the room with them while they sleep. It works in stages:

1. Sat by (not on) the bed, maintaining physical contact (hand on hand, arm etc.) until child falls asleep. Contact should be still, no stroking.
2. Sat by the bed, not making any physical contact.
3. Move the chair away from the bed, but stay in the room.
4. Sit in the chair by the door.
5. Chair is outside of the room, by the door.
6. Child settles in room alone and you get on with your evening.

Whichever stage a parent/carer is at, if a child wakes in the night, they must re-settle at the same point i.e. if the chair is by the door, sit by the door again, don't go back to sitting by the bed.

You may need to spend a few nights or more at each stage: once your child is happy with one stage you can move on to the next the following night. The time that it takes to graduate from one stage to the next depends on each child and family. Some will progress after a few days, others weeks.

“Boring parent”

Many children resist the graduated withdrawal, and it can be difficult to be consistent. However, it is worth persevering.

If a child gets up during the settling routine, it is essential to be a “boring parent” and return them straight to bed. No talking, no hugs or kisses, only limited physical contact. Once they realise that you are not going to engage further, they should start to settle more quickly.