

Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)

IRT can help your child take control of your dreams and change scary ones into less frightening, more positive dreams. For young kids, parent involvement is important for guidance, support, and helping them feel safe during the process.

#1

Encourage your child to write or draw their nightmare in as much detail as possible. Help them capture everything they remember, such as how it felt, what happened, and who was there. It is best to do this during a low-stress part of the day.

#2

Right after writing or drawing the nightmare, have your child go through it again, but stop when it starts to feel frightening. Then, guide them to change the story. What if the scary thing became silly or they had superpowers? Help them use their creativity to make the threat smaller and themselves stronger.

#3

The next day, support your child in writing or drawing their new dream, starting from the beginning and continuing to the new, positive ending. Encourage vivid details, like creating a movie in their mind. Children do not need to write or draw their dream each day; verbal rehearsal is often enough.

#4

After your child practices the new dream during the day, cue them to recall it at bedtime. They can say it out loud, and looking at their written version may help. Then, guide them through a grounding exercise to relax and focus on the present. Practicing both dream rehearsal and grounding helps make this feel more natural for their brain.

#5

Continue bedtime recall with your child for at least 10 days. If nightmares persist, repeat the process of writing, rescripting, and doing at least one daytime written rehearsal. Regular practice will help your child feel more in control and confident in managing their dreams.

MY NIGHTMARE

Think about the last nightmare that you can remember or bothers you the most. Close your eyes for a moment and try to remember everything you can about it. What did you see, hear, or feel? Were there any people, places, or things that stood out to you? Now, write the nightmare in as much detail as possible. Do not worry about making it perfect.

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

CHANGING THE STORY

Now that you have written your nightmare, it is time to make it less frightening. Write the dream again but stop when it starts to feel scary. Then, change the story. What if the scary thing became funny or you had superpowers? Make the threat smaller and yourself stronger! You are the author of your dream and can decide what happens next!

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

REHEARSING THE NEW DREAM

To help your brain learn this new skill, we need to rehearse! Write your new dream, starting from the beginning and going all the way to the new ending. Make the details as clear and vivid as possible, just like a movie in your head. Practicing this at least once a day will help your brain remember your new dream and make it easier to change when you sleep.

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