

## A Gentle Method for Getting Children to Sleep Part Two

By Colby Pearce



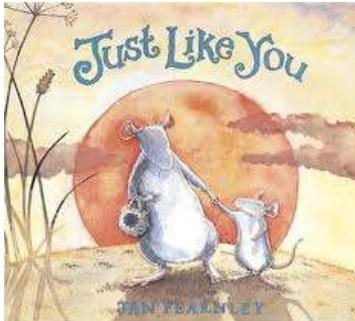
This is a follow-up to the very popular article *A Gentle Method for Getting Children to Sleep in their Own Beds*. In that article I referenced reading books, singing lullabies and playing relaxing classical music in the child's sleeping environment. In this article I will expand on what books I read, what lullabies I sang, and what music I used.

Before we get too far in to the article, I want to mention that although I commonly see results from this method within a short period of time (e.g. days), I would recommend maintaining the method for at-least several months, or even years, depending on the age and needs of the child. Bedtime rituals are an opportunity to spend one-to-one, special time with the child and, implemented consistently, promote the child's psychological readiness to accept separation and slide peacefully to sleep. I maintained bedtime rituals for each of my children for varying lengths of time. In the case of my youngest son, I used the above methodology until he was seven years of age, transitioning to more and more sophisticated books over time, and gradually phasing out lullabies and songs. Thereafter, I maintained some form of bedtime ritual until he reached his early teens. I might add that the rituals I followed were implemented every night, so I made sure that I only started what I could keep up over time. Consistency is calming, and inconsistency (such as starting and stopping something) is irritating, and hence, interferes with a child's readiness to fall asleep.

As I mentioned in my earlier article, I tended to use a small number of lullabies and books across a given period, for consistency sake and because an association is built between the lullabies and books and feelings of readiness to fall sleep (i.e. sleepiness). Psychologists refer to this association as *classical conditioning*, and its effect is that the child can become sleepy when the same songs are sung or books are read, whatever time of the day. Over time, one or more new lullabies/songs would be introduced at a time, and one dropped off the 'list'. I used to sing all the widely-familiar lullabies (I used a book of lullabies and we went through the book while I sang) and I also sang other songs, such as the Postman Pat theme (sometimes substituting in the name of my child for 'Postman Pat'). I particularly liked to sing *The Ants go Marching* last and observed that my son would either fall asleep or be very close by the time I finished.

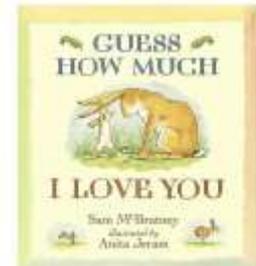


In terms of the books I read, over time there was a wide range, from simple nursery stories to, when my son was seven, children's novels. I want to mention three here, that were particularly popular with us.



The first was a book called *Just Like You*, by Jan Fearnley, which is a story that follows Mumma Mouse and Little Mouse as they travel home and Little Mouse's observation of the interactions of other animal parents and their young. It is a lovely book that reinforces knowledge of the care and protection parents afford their young, and associated bonds of love. This was my personal favorite and I cannot recommend it highly enough

The second book we used was the very popular *Guess How Much I Love You*, by Sam McBratney. This book tells the story of the interaction between Big Nutbrown Hare and his son, Little Nutbrown Hare, about how big is their love of each other. This is also a lovely book for preschool-aged children.

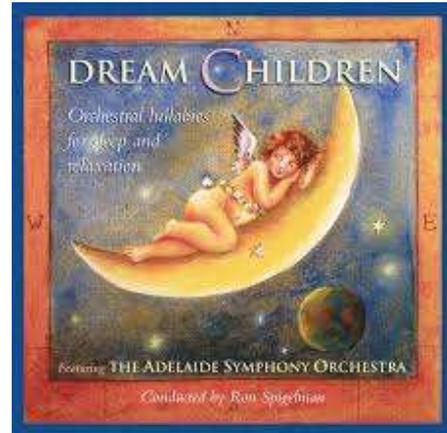


The third book we used was *The Staircase Cat*, by Colin Thompson. It tells the story of a cat that becomes separated from its caretakers during a war, and of their eventual reunion. Warning, it is an emotional read, but the theme of separations and reunions is particularly poignant at bedtime. This one is better-used with older, school-aged child.

Finally, I recommend playing relaxing classical music in the child's sleeping environment, all night, every night. The reason being is that, apart from also introducing an element of consistency into the bedtime and sleeping routine, it is known, as the word suggests, that *relaxing* classical music induces relaxation and deepens sleep - even when the child is asleep already. The latter is supported by a study of patients undergoing surgery, where soothing music was played during some procedures and not others. The study showed that during those procedures where soothing music was played in the operating theatre the patients required less anaesthetic than those where soothing music was not played. That is, the soothing music helped to deepen sedation.

I recommend that the music is played very quietly, so that it is only just audible in a quiet room. I also recommend leaving it on all night, so the child sleeps restfully all night and awakens refreshed. Start the music playing while singing and reading (beware, you might also fall asleep!), and leave it on when you leave. If the child complains that the music keeps them awake, start it after they have gone to sleep and/or put it on in an adjacent room or hallway. The latter is also recommended if the device on which the music is being played is likely to be a distraction and temptation to the child.

I recommend using the *Dream Children* compilation, by Ron Spigelman and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. It is available for purchase on both the iTunes and the Google Play Store.



For further reading, I recommend my books about attachment, and resilience; both of which can be purchased through [securestart.com.au](http://securestart.com.au).

