

Scheduled Awakenings for Disorders of Arousal (Parasomnias)

Confusional arousals, sleep terrors, sleep talking, and sleepwalking are different types of the same disorder. These events are also known as *partial arousal parasomnias* (which means “partially awake and partially asleep”). Your child may behave as if she is awake, or she may seem confused or upset. But she is actually sleeping through these events. Even though she may say things that do not make sense, she is not dreaming or having a nightmare.

Scheduled awakenings are used for children who have a lot of predictable parasomnia events. This means at least several times per week and around the same time each night. The following provides guidance on how to use scheduled awakenings with your child.

1. **For the next 2 weeks, keep track of your child’s sleep patterns.** You should record her bedtime, wake time, and the timing of the parasomnia events.
2. **Once you see a consistent pattern of events, find the average time she has a sleep terror (or sleep walking) event and determine the amount of time between her falling asleep and the sleep terror event.** Scheduled awakenings should occur 15 to 30 minutes *before* she typically has her first event. So for example, if her average bedtime is 8:00 p.m. and her average sleep terror is at 9:30 p.m., the scheduled awakening time is between 9:00 and 9:15 p.m.
3. **At the designated time, go in and gently rouse your child** with a light touch or a soft verbal prompt.
4. **Once she arouses (i.e., opens her eyes, changes positions, and/or tells you that she is awake), allow her to return to sleep.**

Important Things to Remember

- If you cannot identify a consistent pattern for events, then you should not use scheduled awakenings.
- This is not a quick treatment! It usually takes 2 to 4 weeks of consistently waking her at the same time every night for the parasomnia events to subside.
- If the scheduled awakening time is after you usually go to bed, you will have to set an alarm clock to wake you at the same time each night. This will help you be consistent about arousing your child. (Although this feels like a disruption to your sleep, you will be waking up anyway when she has her event!)
- It is possible that you will trigger a sleep terror or sleep walking event in your child by using scheduled awakenings. If this happens, do not interfere with the event or try to wake her. Instead, move the scheduled awakening time earlier by 15 minutes.
- If your child has an event before the scheduled awakening time, move the time earlier by 15 minutes for subsequent nights.

Scheduled awakenings work well for children who have sleep terrors or sleep walking at the same time almost every night. However, this treatment can take 2 to 4 weeks, and you must be consistent every night for it to be effective.
