Night Terrors Encyclopedia Article

Night Terrors

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Night Terrors

Also referred to as pavor nocturnus, a childhood sleep disorder featuring behavior that appears to be intense fear.

Night terrors, known medically as *pavor nocturnus,* are episodes that apparently occur during the non-dreaming stages of **sleep** in some children. Episodes of night terrors are most common in the preschool and early school years. Night terrors usually occur within an hour or two after the child has fallen asleep, and generally do not recur with any frequency or regularity. Many children experience only one episode of night terrors, and few experience more than three or four such episodes over the whole course of childhood. A parent or **earegiver** witnessing an episode of night terrors, which usually lasts from ten to thirty minutes, will find the behavior unsettling. The child sits up abruptly in bed, appears to be extremely upset, cries out or screams, breathes heavily, and perspires. He or she might also thrash about, kicking, and his or her eyes may bulge out, seemingly in fear of something. The child does not wake during the episode, although his or her eyes will be open, and he or she will be unresponsive to any offers of comfort. The child falls back to sleep, and will have no memory of the occurrence. Night terrors have not been shown to have any link to personality or emotional disorders, although they may be related to a specific feeling of fear that the child has experienced, such as being startled by someone leaping at him or her from behind a chair, or the sight of someone fainting or having an accident.

For Further Study

Books

Beaudet, Denise. *Encountering the Monster: Pathways in Children's Dreams.* New York: CrossroadContinuum, 1990.

Lansky, Vicki. *Getting Your Child to Sleep—and Back to Sleep: Tips for Parents of Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers.* Deephaven, MN: Book Peddlers, 1991.

Thorpy, Michael. *The Encyclopedia of Sleep and Sleep Disorders.* New York: Facts of File, 1990.

Organizations

Association of Sleep Disorders Centers (ASDC)
Address: 602 Second Street, SW
Rochester, MN 55902
(Professional organization of specialists in sleep disorders; publishes the journal *Sleep.)*