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NOVEMBER 2007 ISSUE 25 \$2.99

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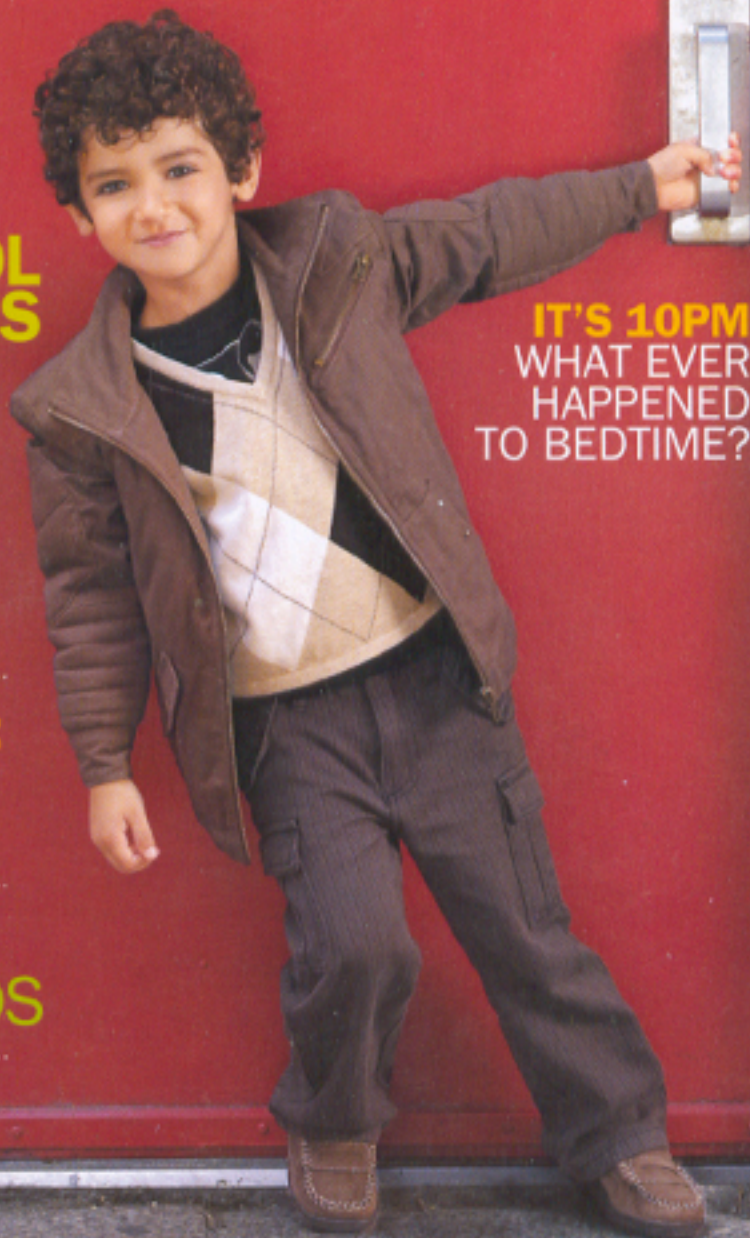
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Dontcha want to make him stay up late?



Children of the night

Are later bedtimes spawning a city of tiny zombies? By **Nicole Caccavo Kear**

Bedtime used to be a simple affair—a bath, a story, maybe some warm milk and then lights out, all by 7:30pm.

But in the city that never sleeps, in the age of dual earner families and heavy-duty homework, New York City kids' bedtimes are getting pushed back. "There are a finite number of hours in a day, and parents are trying to meet everyone's demands," says Lisa Spiegel, a mom of two and the founder and codirector of Soho Parenting. "Parents want to spend time with their kids, and this is one way they feel they can do it."

For Upper East Side mom Alyson Spindell, bedtime became troublesome when her son Benjamin was just an infant. Like many city parents, Spindell's husband, David, regularly worked until 8pm and would come home night after night to find the baby asleep. "David left for work in the morning before Benjamin was up, so there were days when they didn't even see each other. It made David very upset," says Spindell. After much

discussion, the couple decided it was important for their son to have quality time with Dad. The result: Three-year-old Benjamin now goes to bed at 9pm.

Becky Rent of Kensington, Brooklyn, experienced a similar situation. Her three-year-old daughter, Claire, doesn't usually hit the sack until 10 or 11pm, after she, her parents and her grandparents have all eaten dinner together. (Grandma works for a private investment firm on Wall Street and doesn't get home until late.) "If we lived elsewhere in the country, Claire's bedtime would probably be earlier," says Rent. "But this is just the New York City way, and it works for us."

Work schedules aren't all that get in the way of a child's early bedtime. "Living in New York, it's hard not to be overstimulated," says Sharon Dupree, lower-school principal of the Little Red Schoolhouse in the West Village. "You want your child to take advantage of the city." Which is exactly what Felicia of Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, helped her three kids do last summer. "We went to

opera in the park, and on those nights, the kids didn't get home until almost midnight," says Felicia, whose children are eight, five and two. "When we invited friends, they would say, 'Are you kidding me?' But our attitude is, it's fun." Still, she can't help feeling a little embarrassed about the late hours they keep. "My two-year-old is rarely asleep before 10:30pm. I don't usually tell people because I worry they'll think I'm harming my child."

For older kids, the lure and pressures of school-related activities can make it hard to fit sleep into their schedules. "Kids are trying to cram 30 hours into 24," says George Lazarus, M.D., a pediatrician at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. "They've got sports, playdates, homework, and then they need downtime to chill out. In the end, what gets squeezed is sleep."

On top of that, adds Spiegel, is the attitude that bedtime is a little, well, uncool. "People think it's quaint," she explains. Stephanie LaTour can vouch

for that; the Park Slope mom's six-year-old twins hit the sack at 8pm every night. "The only problem we run into is peer pressure," says LaTour. "People think we're strict and try to convince us to keep the kids up later."

But late bedtimes can cause problems, say experts, if children aren't able to make up the sleep they've missed. "Kids will often wake up at the same time in the morning, even if they've gone to bed two hours later," says Spiegel. "And if there's one thing kids need to grow, it's sleep." Exhaustion can affect a child's mood and attention and frustration levels, she adds, and she suggests that parents try to alternate the nights they come home earlier from work. Or that they try making breakfast the family meal. "A lot of parents feel that quality time with their kids trumps everything," says Spiegel. "But children need to get rest. Plus, this way, when they do stay up late, it will be a treat." Just the way we remember it.