



## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Bedwetting: A manual for parents**

by Jan Matthews

Melbourne: Ramsay-Cooté Instruments 1994, 28pp. RRP \$5.00

The first thing to notice about this book is the clever illustration on the front page which depicts two children sleeping in a double bunk. The upper child (a bedwetter) sleeps blissfully, while the lower child, looking remorseful and frustrated, lies awake holding an umbrella over his head. This sets the tone of the book, which acknowledges that bedwetting is a common and troublesome problem, but at the same time aims to reassure the reader that there is a readily available solution. It then proceeds to describe, in down-to-earth language, appropriate management strategies.

The first chapter covers issues that are almost always of interest to parents of children who wet the bed. These include: the prevalence of bedwetting, causes of the problem, the age at which it is appropriate to take action, and the association between children with physical disability and bedwetting. Most parents and children who have to contend with this problem should readily identify with the story of 'Spike', the lovable 7 year old bedwetter presented at the beginning of the book.

A range of treatment strategies is summarised in chapter two, beginning with a light-hearted look at ancient folk lore remedies, and an early reminder of the danger of using ridicule and punishment in response to bedwetting accidents. Then modern day treatment methods, including medication, reward systems, waking schedules, bladder training exercises, urine-alarm devices, dry bed training, hypnosis and avoidance of caffeine are summarised.

Chapter three provides a protocol for the assessment of the problem prior to commencement of therapy. This includes recommendation for an initial medical assessment, detailed recording of bedwetting patterns prior to treatment

and guidelines for the choice of treatment based on the outcome of the initial assessment procedure. It becomes readily apparent that the author considers the bell and pad procedure is the preferred treatment option for the vast majority of bedwetters and there is ample research data in the literature to support this view.

The bell and pad (or bedwetting alarm) procedure is described in detail in chapter 4. This begins with a simple explanation of how the procedure works and an important reminder that nothing in the procedure can hurt the child. Unfortunately, there are still a number of myths about the bedwetting alarm, one of which is that the child is given an electric shock in response to bedwetting or, at the very least, the alarm system is run from an electrical power source. The author makes it clear that the bedwetting alarm is run by a battery and is designed to sound a loud noise the instant a bedwetting event occurs and over time, this repeated association serves to condition the bladder to work normally during sleep. The chapter goes on to provide a detailed description of the alarm treatment, embracing the method of setting up the equipment, psychological preparation of the child, initial practice sessions, the normal nightly procedure once therapy has begun and things to avoid that can impair the effectiveness of therapy. The importance of accurate record keeping throughout the program is emphasised. The final stage; ie, after the child has achieved 14 consecutive dry nights, is then described. This involves a period of 'overlearning', which requires the child to drink extra fluid before going to bed in order to fully test bladder control and thereby reduce likelihood of relapse, and a period of follow up to monitor progress after the program is completed. The chapter concludes by addressing maintenance of equipment and a troubleshooting guide to problems that

might arise, though this information is directed at the conventional bell and pad apparatus and some of the information is not applicable to alternate types of urine alarm devices.

The final chapter of the book contains a 'consumer's guide' including details of where equipment can be obtained; where to locate professional help - as supervision of the program is highly important in determining the success rate; and questions for parents to ask when seeking help.

In summary, Jan Matthew's book, in 24 pages, provides much relevant information about bedwetting and a very comprehensive guide for parents whose children undergo treatment for this condition using the bell and pad device. The book is written in a very clear, down-to-earth style and maintains a practical focus to the point of enclosing record-keeping forms that can be photocopied and used for each child's treatment program.

This reviewer agrees with almost everything that is written in the book and believes it is a significant contribution to families that have to contend with the problem of bedwetting. The only significant disappointment is the scant attention given to equipment other than the traditional bell and pad apparatus. There are now a number of smaller alarms that are worn by the child and have the advantage of being considerably less expensive than the bell and pad equipment. Some addition to the manual's description of the treatment procedure would be needed to accommodate personally worn alarms.

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