

Learning to be Dry at Night – Experiences of a Real Nappy Mum Zoe, and Cam, 3

Cam's quite a determined boy. Usually he'll decide to do something and then stick with it faithfully, especially if that something will make him feel like a Big Boy. So far a Yes for choosing his own clothes, Yes for fastening his own shoes, Yes for going to Nursery every morning... the list goes on. But he had been noticeably slow on the night-nappy front, compared to how his big sister had been, at least. I had heard many times that boys tend to be more 'retentive' in this area and was prepared to not push him, but really there was no interest at all, nor did I notice as time went on that the nappies were any less wet in the morning – they were always soaking.

You can easily imagine why a child would hang on to this last vestige of babyhood. It's so much easier to drift off to sleep and just let nature take its' course, as he or she had been doing at night all their life so far. However grown-up a child is or wants to be during the day, things tend to change when they are befuddled by sleep at night. And who wants to learn a difficult new habit during the time they are supposed to be having a lovely undisturbed rest?

So I understood from the beginning of this that it was likely to be me who was much more motivated than him – I would be the one anxious not to have to strip the bed and wash sheets in the morning – and that it might be a long slog.

I visited Seesaw on Broughton Street for advice. The shop assistant had had her own experience with this, and suggested that a) you should not give your child anything to drink in the hour before bed, b) they should use the potty just before getting in bed, and if these things didn't work you should also c) wake them up when you yourself are going to bed, and get them to use the potty, then let them go back to sleep. I didn't think Cam would like the idea of this last one, and I was right as it turned out.

He mentioned one evening a few months ago that he didn't like the 'feel' of wearing nappies any more, and I swooped on my chance, casually suggesting we could go without one that night. I had a cotton-covered rubber bed protector, so far un-used, and I put it under his sheet, and told him I would be waking him up later to use the potty. When I did, he was extremely against waking up. He used his not inconsiderable strength to stay in bed with his eyes firmly shut! As all this started to seem counter-productive, I decided to let him stay in bed and see what happened in the morning.

He had wet the bed, but it wasn't a big problem to wash the sheet and bed protector. The good thing was that he had had a night without the feel of a big nappy around him and could start to associate that with this newness, this potential wetness. He was quite surprised to be so wet and visibly seemed to want to 'do better' from the very next night onwards, and really has done since – not 100% of course, and he never has a night where I don't put the protector under the sheet. But he has made a conscious effort to know when he has a full bladder in bed, and to hold it in until he can use the potty – something which I praise him for every time as I am so impressed. I'm not sure we would have had this success if I had gone for any kind of night-time pull-up nappy because I think Cam needed to feel that there was nothing wrapping him up any more AND also to know how it felt to be thoroughly wet in bed – not nice.

Cotton bed protectors are great and you can buy them from about £10 from most internet baby sites.