

The "Witching" Hours

New mothers will find that late afternoon until children's bedtime will be the most challenging hours of the day. These hours are often packed with routines (meal, bath, and bed) at a time when children are either tired or wired. Throw in an exhausted parent and you have a potential brew of exasperation. To avoid ending every day at the end of your rope, do what you can to make this time period run as smoothly as possible.

BEWITCHING TIPS TO TRY

- Drop everything! Know that this is a tough time and prepare – don't take phone calls, plan to be at home, try to plan ahead.
- Have as much meal planning and preparation done in advance as possible. Make supper whenever you get time during the day, and heat it up as needed at meal time. Crock pots are ideal.
- If you are making dinner, allow the kids to "help" if possible. Giving them small things to do both keeps them busy and may entice them to eat what "they've" made.
- Stick to a schedule, and try to get everyone fed early.
- Get the children outside playing if possible – go for a walk, let them run around.
- Take walks in the stroller every afternoon.
- Carry baby in a sling, front pack, or backpack as they love the motion and it keeps them content.
- Save a special video or a favorite taped TV show that they are allowed to watch only at this time.
- Keep noise and extra stimulation to a minimum by turning off electronics.
- Play soothing music.
- Provide quiet activities, such as puzzles, coloring and story time.
- Have a "grab bag" of activities that only comes out during this time, so the activities will be more exciting.
- Provide a small, nutritious snack in mid-afternoon so that your children are not running out of fuel.
- Give yourself slack – if the kitchen's a mess, the playroom's a disaster, and you've given them noodles three nights in a row, don't worry, there's always tomorrow!
- Sing a lot of silly songs with actions, pillow fights, crazy dancing to music – anything to make your child laugh and be active so that they are ready for bed with happy thoughts.
- Loosen your grip on getting tasks done and spend time with the kids. Things will get done.
- Take cool-off time if you think you're going to lose it! Have one small area of your house that is always clean and organized, and take a five minute breather there to get yourself together (even if it's the bathroom!).
- When old enough, give the kids jobs to do such as setting the table, putting recyclables into bin, and cleaning up the toys.

Some of what makes this so tough is that we are trying to do everything! With patience waning and fatigue increasing, it is the worst time to tackle the chores that await us. Establish a routine that works for everyone. I always found that the closer I kept my kids to me at this time, the easier it was for me to manage it all.