

MARTIN THE MONKEY

a calming bedtime story



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Written by Laura Betts, LICSW, MSW

Illustrated by Jesse Willmon



Dear Parents,

After a day full of frenetically paced learning and playing, it can be immensely helpful for kids to have a consistent way to wind down before it's time to sleep. All children, but especially those who are troubled by anxiety, can benefit from a regular bedtime routine that includes simple relaxation techniques. (Though some families offer snacks or drinks as part of a bedtime routine, this may contribute to nighttime wetting. Talk with your child's doctor about limiting liquids in the evening if this is a problem for your child.)

You know your child best, so you should tailor his bedtime routine to his individual temperament and level of development. Bedtime routines often include favorite stories, relaxing music, and rituals that are soothing to your child. (If your child wets the bed, a comforting routine is especially important as falling asleep may be a very nervous time for him.)

The following story introduces three relaxation techniques: **progressive muscle relaxation**, **positive visualization**, and **deep-belly breathing**. These techniques take practice, but performed nightly, they may help calm your child before bed.



Consult your child's pediatrician about any bedwetting questions you might have. And if you have concerns about your child's level of anxiety, ask your pediatrician for a referral to a mental-health professional who specializes in working with children and anxiety.

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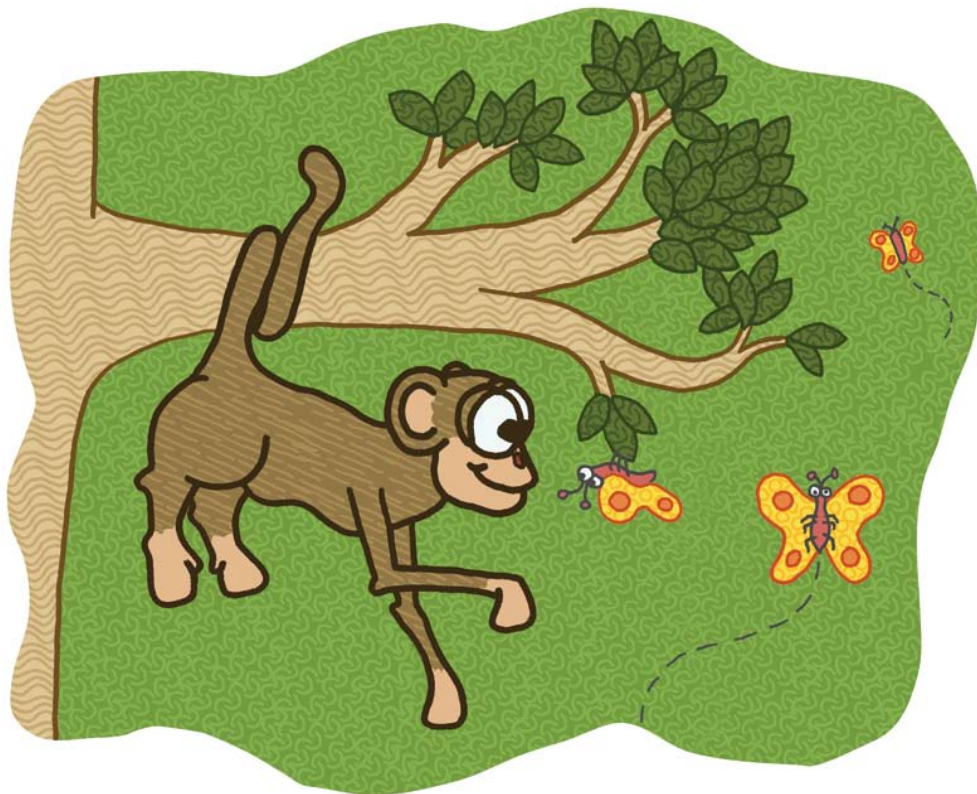
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Martin the Monkey opens one eye and then the other. The smell of banana pancakes fills his room. He can tell it's going to be a very, very good day. Martin walks down the stairs into the kitchen, where he finds his mom, dad, and sister already at the table. They all live together in a small treetop house in the middle of the jungle.

With a belly full of pancakes, Martin is ready for his day. You see, Martin is a very strong and curious monkey. Martin has many, many adventures during the day.

Martin loves to climb up and down the trees of the jungle where his family lives. He uses his strong arms and legs to move quickly. Swinging from branch to branch, he sees parrots, frogs, and the most beautiful butterflies. Sometimes he stops and takes a closer look.





Today Martin and his sister climb to the top of the biggest tree in the jungle, where they build a fort. They pretend the fort is a pirate ship. Martin is the captain, and they are off to find the treasure!

A map leads the way to gold coins, gems, and other riches.

After a long day in the jungle, Martin and his sister swing back home. Martin eats supper and







has his bath—and of course pretends he’s back on the pirate ship, searching for more treasure!

“Time for bed,” Martin’s mom says after he climbs out of the tub. But Martin is still very excited from his day. He can’t imagine falling asleep. “I don’t want to go to bed,” he protests. “I have too many adventures to go on ... I just am not ready to sleep.”



Martin’s mom smiles and gives him a wink. “Well, I guess we will have to try a few things from my bag of tricks,” she says. Martin is a very curious monkey, so of course he wants to know what that could mean. He follows his mom into his bedroom and slides into his bed.



“Let me look into my bag here,” his mom says, pretending to open a sack in front of her and peer inside. Martin giggles; he loves when Mom pretends with him.



“Ah, yes, you went on many adventures today, Martin. Is that right?” she asks. Martin nods. “I bet you climbed many, many trees and swung from many branches. You must be a very strong monkey to do such things!”

“Now, as you are lying here in your bed, I want you to pretend that just your muscles in your feet and legs are getting very strong,” his mother says. “Make your muscles as tight as



they can be and count *one ... two ... three ... four ... five.*” Martin clenches his toes, tightens his calves and legs, and counts slowly. “Now, let go of your muscles and let your feet and legs flop like cooked spaghetti,” she says. Martin lets them all go limp. “Let’s try the same thing with your belly, chest, and arms,” his mom says. “Make your muscles at the top of your body *tight, tight, tight,* and now count *one ... two ... three ... four ... five.* Good!”

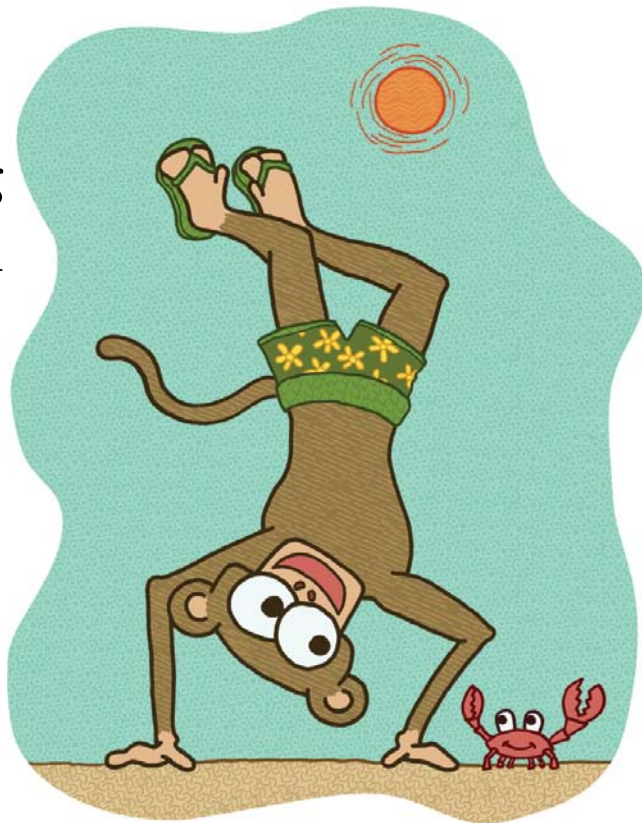
“Now let your belly, chest, and arms flop like cooked spaghetti,” she says. Marvin unclenches his muscles, letting his shoulders sink gently into his pillow.





Martin relaxes into his bed. His muscles don't feel like going on as many adventures now, but he still doesn't feel ready to go to sleep. "I can tell we need to look into my bag of tricks again," his mom says, pretending to look deep inside her wide bag. "Let's see ... hmmm ... ah, yes. Got it!" She looks at Martin and smiles. "Can you tell me about a very fun memory or a time when you felt cozy and warm?"

Martin thinks and thinks and thinks ... and then he has it! He remembers a very warm day last summer when his whole family went to the beach near their home. That day Martin

swam and climbed many trees. He went fishing with his mom and he helped set up a picnic with his dad. His dad took out Martin's favorite treats one by one: peanut butter and banana sandwiches, banana chips, and banana ice cream for dessert! Martin remembers that after he ate, he ran down the beach as fast as he could, feeling the sunlight and a soft breeze. With the warm sun on his face, he had curled up and taken a quick nap on the sand.





Martin relaxes into his bed. His muscles don't feel like going on as many adventures now, but he still doesn't feel ready to go to sleep.

“Let's try one more trick,” his mom says. She pretends to reach way down into her bag. “OK. Got it,” she says quietly.

She looks at Martin's favorite bear. “Place Teddy on your belly,” she says. Martin rests his teddy bear on his stomach while his mom puts her hands on her own belly. “Watch Teddy, and try to gently make him go up when you breathe in. Ready? Breathe in ... watch Teddy go up ... *one, two, three, four*. Good, now let Teddy go back down, *one, two, three, four*.”

“Let’s try it two more times,” she says. “Breathe in ... watch Teddy go up ... *one, two, three, four*. Good, now let Teddy go back down, *one, two, three, four*.”

“Last time,” his mom says. “Breathe in ... watch Teddy go up ... *one, two, three, four*. Good, now let Teddy go back down, *one, two, three, four*.”

Lying in his bed, wrapped in his favorite blanket, Martin feels warm. His arms and legs feel heavy, and his eyes are slowly closing. The many adventures of his day seem far, far away.



“Good night Martin, I love you.” His mom leans over and kisses the top of his head. Martin’s eyes close and he falls fast asleep, dreaming of the beach and the sun shining on his face. He certainly will be a well-rested monkey when it’s time for tomorrow’s adventures.

