

# Creating a Story to Reduce and Eliminate Nightmares in Young Children

## Basic structure of the story for nightmares

### Jake and the Monster in His Dream

Begin by having the child describe their nightmare in detail. Help the child choose his/her favorite superhero to be used in their story, the Fairy Godmother from Cinderella) or make up his/her own superhero, like "Mystic-Man". Have balloons or other props available.

**1. Begin the story by describing the child:**

*"Once upon a time there was a boy named Jake with blonde hair and blue eyes. Jake went to pre-school and had lots of friends. He loved to fish and to play with his dog, Rocket."*

**2. Describe the nightmare and what the child thinks, feels, and does in the dream he/she has described. Include the impact of the nightmare on the child:**

*"One-night Jake went to sleep and had a very scary nightmare. He dreamed that a big, white monster was chasing him, and Jake was really scared. He held up his hand to try to stop the monster, but this didn't work. The dream was so scary that Jake woke up screaming, "Mommy, Mommy." Jake was so afraid that he would dream about the monster again that he didn't want to go to bed the next night."*

**3. Continue the story by indicating on a night that followed, the child went to sleep and began to have a similar nightmare, and when this happens, the superhero they have chosen appears in his/her dream to help them:**

*"The next night when Jake went to sleep, he began to dream, then Mystic-Man appeared in his dream. Mystic-Man said, "Jake, I'm going to show you how to get rid of monsters in your dreams."*

*"Really?" asked Jake. "Thanks a lot. How are you going to do that?"*

*"Just keep sleeping," Mystic-Man told him, "and when you have a nightmare about scary monsters, I'll be there to help you."*

*"Wow!", said Jake. "That's great because I need some help. The monster in my dream is really scary."*

*As Jake continued to sleep, he soon began dreaming about the big white scary monster. Then Mystic-Man appeared. Mystic-Man had a pen in his hand; the pen had a sharp point on the end. Mystic-Man walked up to the white monster and said, "Watch this, Jake. I'm*

*going to stick this white monster with this pen and make it pop, just like a balloon.”*

- 4. Have the superhero stick the scary figure with a pen or, if other things would be more age or culturally appropriate for a particular child, such as a ray gun or magic wand, use that). The superhero can use anything that eliminates or takes away the power of the scary figure in the nightmare. (This should not be something that could be a dangerous thing for a child to use, like a sharp knife.)**

*Jake was still very scared of the white monster, so he hid behind Mystic-Man and watched him stick the monster with the pen. The white monster popped, just like a balloon. The pieces of the monster flew up in the air and then fell to the floor looking like white plastic or paper. The monster was gone!*

*“I told you I would help you,” said Mystic-Man. “Look at the monster now. He is nothing but a flat piece of plastic. Does he look scary now?”*

*Jake was happy to say that the monster wasn’t scary anymore.*

- 5. Empower the child to eliminate the scary figure on their own:**

*Mystic-Man turned to Jake and said, “I’m going to give you my pen so that the next time a white monster or any monster comes into your dreams, you can stick them with this pen and the monster will pop.”*

*“No way”, said Jake. “You have to come into my dreams and stick the monster. I’m scared.”*

*“The next time you have a scary dream; I’ll come and help you stick the monster” Mystic-Man said. But you are very smart and very powerful, and **you can figure out how to get rid of monsters in your dreams. (spoken slightly louder and more forcefully).***

*“Okay,” said Jake, trying to be brave.*

*The next night, Jake went to bed and after a while, the white monster appeared in his dream. Quickly, Mystic-Man was there in his dream, too. Mystic-Man handed Jake the pen that could eliminate monsters. “Stick that monster and make him disappear”, Mystic-Man said.*

*Jake was very scared, but he stuck the monster with the pen anyway. When Jake stuck the monster, it popped and spun around and around, getting smaller and smaller and smaller, just like a balloon, when it pops. (Make the noise a balloon makes when it pops and releases air). Soon the white monster was nothing but flat pieces of plastic on the floor.*

*“I told you that you could get rid of monsters that come into your dreams, Jake”, Mystic-Man said, as he patted Jake on the shoulder. You are very brave and very smart. I am going to give you my pen to keep so that you can stick any monster that appears in your dreams and make them all disappear.”*

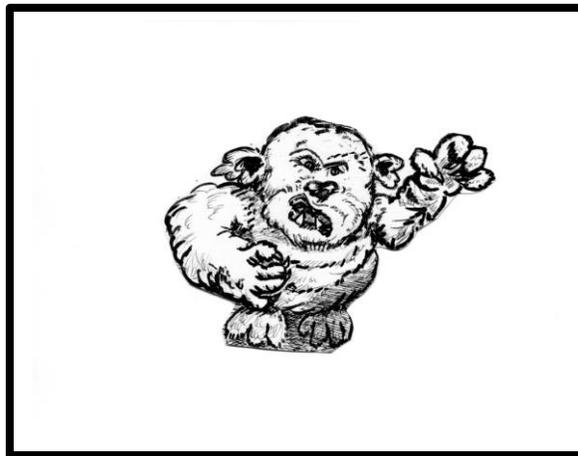
**6. Have the child practice eliminating the scary figure on his or her own:**

*“So, the next night, when Jake went to sleep and started dreaming, the white monster appeared in Jake’s dream and tried really hard to scare him. But Jake pulled out his pen and said, “I’m not afraid of you, monster. You’re nothing but hot air; I’m going to change you into a flat piece of plastic.”*

*Then Jake stuck the monster with the pen and watched, as the air escaped from the monster and it fell, in pieces, to the floor. “I’m not afraid of you monster”, Jake said triumphantly, as he stomped on the pieces of white laying on the floor. “I’m smart and I know how to get rid of any monster that tries to scare me in my dreams.” And he did.*

**7. Have the child experience happy dreams in the following nights.**

*The next night and for many nights after that, when Jake went to sleep, he had happy dreams that made him laugh and learn and sleep all through the night. But, if monsters or other scary things tried to sneak into his dreams, Jake used his pen to make them disappear.*



**8. Repeat the story, using props:**

*Use a pen for the child to stick the scary thing in his/her dreams that he/she can keep. Balloons are also a great prop. If the child describes something in his/her nightmare that can be represented by drawing it on a balloon, ask the color of the scary thing and have the child pick out a balloon of that color. Ask questions of the child about the features of the scary thing. "Jake, what did the monster look like? Does he have teeth? Does he have a big nose?"*

*Then, using a magic marker, draw those features on the balloon to reflect the child's description (or the child can draw them).*

**9. Act out original nightmare, using the balloon:**

*"Once upon a time there was a boy named Jake. One night, Jake went to bed and he had a scary dream. In this dream, he saw a big white monster. The monster was very scary and mean. It said, "I'm going to get you Jake and it growled. Jake held up his hand to keep the monster away, but the monster kept coming. Then Jake pulled out a pen and stuck the monster."*

Hold the balloon with the features drawn on it up so that the child can stick it with the pen. If the child is initially too afraid to stick the balloon monster without help, support his/her hand until he/she gains the courage to stick the balloon monster on their own. When the balloon pops, praise the child and encourage him/her to stomp on the balloon and say, "I'm not afraid of you ....."

*"Jake popped the monster with his pen. See, the monster is nothing more than this piece of white plastic on the floor. It's not scary at all. Stomp on the monster, Jake, and say, 'I'm not afraid of you, monster!'"*

**10. Add a future pace<sup>1</sup> to illustrate that the child will be able to eliminate any other scary figures that appear in future dreams:**

*Jake was very smart and very brave. He had learned how to get rid of monsters that came into his dreams. Jake kept his pen and used it every time that a monster or other scary thing tried to scare him in his dreams. Jake had discovered that he was smarter than monsters.*

This is a very empowering technique to use with young children; they often want the story repeated again and again, so they can pop balloon monsters and feel powerful.

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<sup>1</sup> Rehearsing a future result in one's mind or imagination as a way to have the desired outcome automatically occur (NLP Future Pace; 2019).

