

Sleeping with Beauty, Waking with Wonder

By Lynne Czysz, Waldorf School of Lexington Early Childhood Teacher

Good morning dear earth,
Good morning dear sun,
Good morning dear stones,
And flowers everyone.
Good morning dear buzzy bees,
And birds in the trees.
Good morning to you,
And good morning to me.

Many years ago, I sang the above song outside my children's bedrooms to wake them before school in the morning. Sometimes the song would change with the seasons, and as my son and daughter grew older, I played my kinder harp or a lovely chime, rather than singing. I have such fond memories of that morning activity, a ritual that also helped to anchor me in the present moment, calm me in my busy morning schedule and ready me for the day ahead.

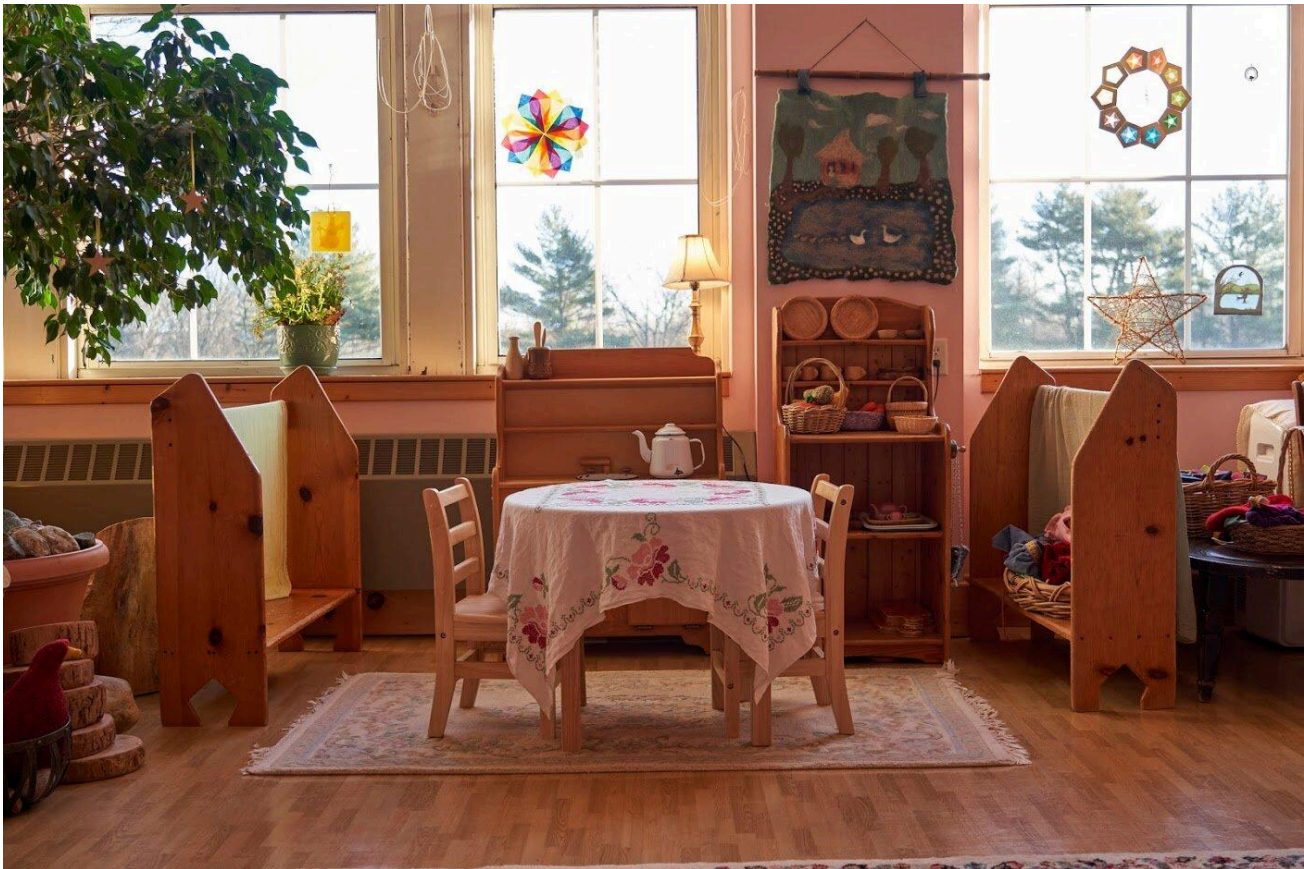


The first time I experienced “receiving” this myself, was when I was attending a Waldorf training. I was staying at a residential home with other students and the house mother woke us with a soft, soothing recorder song. I remember lying in that bed, away from my young children and husband, luxuriating in the sweet, melodious morning music. I felt so cared for by that loving gesture.

During this time of COVID-19, we may have many restrictions but we also have opportunities. Waking and sleeping is eternal, universal, something we will all do for the rest of our lives. What might we want to tweak in our lives right now, to enhance our sleeping cycles, making them a bit more juicy and ripe, so that we can feel more restored, rested and vibrant?

My daughter, Kayla, about to graduate with her Masters degree in social work, recently wrote in a college paper, “The most vital thing to remember is that you do not need to do a single thing during a pandemic (and maybe you shouldn’t) other than follow the guidelines of staying healthy and keeping vulnerable populations healthy too. All of these other ideas about how you can care for yourself and your people are extra. Energy will be minimal. Find a way to sustain connections with loved ones and integrate helpful practices that work well and easily.”

Not everybody is interested in singing to their children in the morning. For some, singing can cause anxiety or discomfort; maybe this is not the time to push your envelope. The idea is to find practices that help to renew us and bring our stress levels down. Maybe it is simply bringing a lighted candle into your child’s bedroom as you kiss them on the forehead to wake them. Maybe it is reading a short verse or morning prayer as you sit on the edge of their bed, holding their favorite doll or stuffed animal. Whatever it may be, finding a rhythm to this, and doing it regularly, helps to bring a sense of calm and reassurance to both parent and child.



The three Rs of Waldorf Education - Rhythm, Repetition and Reverence, are especially important in early childhood, as they help to create healthy life habits. Rhythm is not rigid but it is regular, like our heartbeat and breath. Combining loving rhythm and repetition helps to provide a potent sense of reassurance and support. This is vital for children in developing a sense of wonder and curiosity. When they feel safe, they can explore and play in a healthy and carefree manner. Reverence and gratitude are born of this supportive foundation. What a sweet gift it is for children to have a nourishing waking and sleeping pattern surrounded by predictable, loving actions of the adults around them. The dynamic nurturing force of this work is immeasurable.

The polarity of waking is, Ahhh, a well deserved sleep! Something children especially need for healthy brain development. Our central nervous system, our entire body and soul are regenerated and fortified by a good night's sleep and perhaps an afternoon rest.

Every day, during Aftercare, I read stories to the the children while they rested on a lamb skin and were covered by their soft blankets. During those 20-40 minutes, most children listened to the story, some covered their heads with their blankets and fell asleep, while some children whispered very quietly to themselves in an animated way. But all of the children had some time of stillness. This is a time that our central nervous system integrates our morning activities and refuels us for the rest of the day. [Scientific studies](#) have shown that daytime naps or resting periods help to fortify early memory development, cognitive functions, emotional processing, and self-regulation, as well as health-related factors such as the immune, neuroendocrine, and cardiovascular systems.

Bedtime rituals can also nourish parents. Creating a win/win situation leads to longevity of rhythm and good healthy habits. As a parent, I would often just be getting used to a particular ritual as my children were outgrowing it. They grew so fast! For example, one night your cherished bath time routine will no longer be. Your nine year old will most likely not like you to put essential oil in the tub and clean their little toes with (what used to be) the favorite bath mitt that used to “sing” songs to them!

Below are some morning and bedtime routine ideas that you may find helpful:

Morning



- Set up the breakfast table the night before after cleaning up from dinner. One more chore? Maybe, but some families find it very supportive to find a bit of extra quiet time in the morning. Children can set out place mats, a candle, coffee/tea mugs and maybe a vase with some fresh flowers. This is especially helpful during times of higher anxiety with COVID-19 like we are all experiencing now.
- The night before, review some simple plans for the next day, and help your child to set up for it. It might be something as simple as affirming that the dog's leash is in its usual spot for your morning walk. Or that the sand toys are in the shed for play after breakfast. It does not need to be complicated.

- Laying out weather appropriate clothes the night before can be very comforting for the young child.
- Lighting a candle at breakfast and having a particular activity to snuff the flame out – always important!

All of these activities are about bringing security and comfort to the young child who will thrive when they know what to expect and have activities to look forward to. Spontaneity, creativity and joy flourish with organization and planning. This might seem like an irony but I believe it to be true.

Bedtime

For some gentle steps to encourage healthy sleep within your household, refer to the article [*Gentling your Child into Sleep*](#).

<https://thewaldorfschool.org/insight/2020/5/19/sleeping-with-beauty-waking-with-wonder>