



Shmuli Can't Fall Asleep

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities



Shmuli Can't Fall Asleep

It is nine o'clock, and Shmuli is wide awake.

His pajamas are on. His teeth are brushed. He has said Krias Shema, and a bedtime story has been read. The light is off. But his eyes won't close.

He stares at the ceiling. A thin line of light comes under the door. Down the hall, he can hear his parents moving around.

His mind feels like a big room with a hundred things happening at once. He thinks about the soccer game at recess. He thinks about the math homework. He thinks about whether the class pet hamster misses him.

He rolls to the left. He rolls to the right. He kicks the blanket off. Then he pulls it back on.

At ten o'clock, he pads out to the kitchen. Totty is drinking a glass of water.

"I can't sleep," says Shmuli. "My brain won't turn off."

Totty sets down his glass. "That happens to lots of people. It feels so frustrating, does it not?"

Shmuli nods. "The more I try to sleep, the more awake I feel."

"Do you know why that happens?" asks Totty. "When we tell ourselves, 'I have to sleep right now,' our body feels like it's under pressure. Pressure makes us more awake. Let's try something different. Instead of trying to sleep, we'll help your body slow down."

"How?"

"Come, I'll show you."

Back in bed, Totty sits on the edge of the mattress. "First, we're going to squeeze and let go. Squeeze your toes tight, like you're gripping sand. Hold it for three. Now let go."

Shmuli squeezes his toes, counts to three, and lets go. They feel soft and warm.

"Now your legs. Squeeze them. Hold. Let go. Now your tummy. Now your hands. Now your shoulders, up to your ears. Hold. And let go."

By the time they reach his face, Shmuli's body feels heavy and loose, like a sack of flour.

"Now, we breathe," says Totty. "Put one hand on your belly. Breathe in through your nose and watch your belly rise, like a balloon. Breathe out slowly and watch it sink."

Shmuli breathes. In, the balloon fills. Out, the balloon shrinks. He does it ten times.

"Whenever a thought pops up, you can imagine it's a cloud," says Totty softly. "It floats across the sky, and you let it drift away. You don't have to chase it."

The hamster thought floats by. Shmuli lets it go. The soccer thought floats by. He lets that go too. A yawn comes, a big one. His eyelids feel heavy.

"I'll be right here for a few more minutes," whispers Totty.

When Shmuli opens his eyes again, it is morning. Sunlight lies across the blanket. He doesn't remember falling asleep at all.

"I did it," he tells Mommy at breakfast. "I slept."

"What helped?" she asks.

"Squeeze and let go. And balloon breathing. And letting my thoughts float like clouds."

"Sounds like a perfect bedtime kit," says Mommy.

That night, Shmuli tries it again by himself. He squeezes his toes, his legs, his hands, his shoulders. He breathes like a balloon. When thoughts about homework pop up, he pictures them as clouds.

He doesn't fall asleep in two minutes. It takes a while. But he lies there calmly, instead of tossing and turning. And that feels much better than before.

On Friday night, he hears his little cousin Chaim whimper in the next bed at their Bubby's house. "I can't sleep."

Shmuli whispers, "Squeeze your toes. I'll show you."



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. What time does Shmuli get out of bed to find Totty?

2. What does Shmuli squeeze first?

3. What does Totty say thoughts can be like?

4. Who does Shmuli teach the trick to?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Shmuli's pet hamster lives at school. Fact / Guess
2. Totty is angry that Shmuli is up. Fact / Guess
3. Balloon breathing means breathing slowly with a hand on your belly. Fact / Guess
4. Shmuli falls asleep within two minutes the second night. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. What thoughts keep your brain busy at bedtime?

2. Why does trying hard to sleep make it harder?

3. What helps your body feel heavy and calm?

Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: BEDTIME, BALLOON, CLOUDS, SQUEEZE, BREATHE, HAMSTER

R	T	C	N	P	W	F	S	M	O	J
S	P	O	N	N	U	D	I	P	M	H
H	Q	O	U	P	C	T	E	P	Y	I
A	T	U	O	A	Y	M	N	A	L	Y
M	T	L	E	B	E	D	T	I	M	E
S	S	P	I	E	L	J	R	G	B	V
T	D	S	P	I	Z	D	M	D	B	G
E	U	J	A	B	R	E	A	T	H	E
R	O	B	A	L	L	O	O	N	A	T
R	L	J	R	L	I	D	B	E	G	A
H	C	I	R	I	F	H	G	U	W	K



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. LUDOSC = _____

2. SOET = _____

3. BLNALOO = _____

4. NAKTEBL = _____

5. ATMERHS = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I will squeeze and let go."

"My thoughts are clouds. I can let them float."

"I will breathe like a balloon."



Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Bedtime Chart

#	What I did	How my body felt	Did I rest?
Night 1			
Night 2			
Night 3			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw a belly balloon filling and sinking, with clouds drifting over a sleepy room.





Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. Ten o'clock
2. His toes
3. Clouds floating across the sky
4. His cousin Chaim

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Guess; 3 Fact; 4 Guess

Scrambled words: CLOUDS, TOES, BALLOON, BLANKET, HAMSTER

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.