

The simple device that could end your child's nightmares: US 'Dreamchanger' to be tested here

Children's imaginations can lead to truly terrifying nightmares but Adelaide sleep researchers are about to trial a device that allows a child to 'change the channel' on a bad dream.

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🕒 2 min read July 4, 2020 - 8:00PM Sunday Mail (SA)

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Mum and sleep paediatric researcher Michal Kahn with son Itamar, 5, and daughter Alma, 8, is hopeful a simple 'dream-changer' device will help children manage nightmares. Picture: Tricia Watkinson

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Having children regularly wake up from nightmares or bad dreams can be distressing and disrupting for the entire family.

But a team of Adelaide sleep researchers is hoping a trial of a simple device to help reset little people's thoughts when they wake up terrified in the middle of the night will offer a solution.

Led by Flinders University child psychologist and paediatric sleep expert Michael Gradisar, the trial involves testing the effectiveness of a new US-invented device dubbed the "dream changer" aimed to help break bad dream cycles.

“It just looks like a TV remote and relies upon the imagination of children,” Professor Gradisar said.

“The concept is, children use the dream changer during the night and use the remote to ‘change the channel’ on their bad dreams.

“There has been some evidence in the US it is effective but we are looking at doing a larger trial here in Australia where Adelaide is known as a hub of sleep research.”

Prof Gradisar said there was evidence the global coronavirus pandemic was causing more sleep issues than usual, in young people as well as adults.

“A lot of why we dream seems to be around processing emotions, so for some people who might be feeling a bit more anxious or stressed about the current situation, they are more likely to try and process those emotions left over from the day during their dreams,” he said.

Adelaide mum-of-two Michal Kahn, also a sleep researcher specialising in paediatrics, said her daughter Alma, 8, who suffers from bad dreams had tried the device ahead of the trial.



Little Alma, pictured with mum Michal Kahn, is finding the device useful. Picture: Tricia Watkinson

“It can be really hard when your child is waking up and you see their distress and the fear, sometimes crying, sometimes really scared and not wanting to go back to sleep alone,” she said.

“The imaginations of children are unique and can make them have these really, really vivid nightmares and horrific dreams.

“They can’t always differentiate between dreams and reality and can be really scared when, for example, they wake up in the middle of being devoured by a dinosaur.

“For my daughter, this (device) has given her a sense of control, something she can have in her hand to help protect her from these really awful nightmares.”

Ms Kahn said, depending on the evidence collected, the tool might provide a simple way to help parents and their children manage bad dreams, to avoid the need for more complex approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia.

To take part in the trial, email casc.enquiries@flinders.edu.au