

- Renee Jain: This is Renee Jain, Chief Storyteller at GoZen, and together with my dear friend Kim West, my colleague, we are bringing you the Better Sleep Summit for Kids. Trying to help kids get better sleep, and their families, and people like Natasha, who you're going to meet in a moment, and myself, actually. Today I'm very, very excited. We have a colleague of mine here, someone I have admired for a long time. But we both figured out this was probably the first time we're actually meeting.
- Her name is Natasha Daniels. She is a fabulous child therapist. She has worked with children, teens, and families for over 16 years. She's raw, she's direct, she's funny, she's down to earth. You're going to love her. She's also helped thousands of children, teens, and parents in her practice, and through her writing, through her podcasts, through her YouTube channel. There is so much, but you can find her at anxioustoddlers.com. And we will talk more about that in a bit. Welcome, Natasha, to the summit.
- Natasha Daniels: Thank you, so excited to be here.
- Renee Jain: Yay. So, today we're going to talk about sleep deprivation, which you and I know nothing about. right?
- Natasha Daniels: Not at all.
- Renee Jain: Not at all. I was saying to Natasha before we started, I'm like, "I've prepared for our interview by not getting enough sleep." You were telling me that the same thing happened to you last night.
- Natasha Daniels: Yes, but for a sadder reason. What we're going to be talking about. Anxious kids waking up in the middle of the night.
- Renee Jain: Anxious kids waking up in the middle of the night, so I have one of those myself.
- Natasha Daniels: Perfect timing.
- Renee Jain: Yes, indeed. Okay, so you have been working with kids for a very long time and you've been working with families for a very long time. I would like to start by asking you, in just a very honest way, how often you see sleep issues in your practice and with what age children?
- Natasha Daniels: I think sleep issues are a problem, almost across the board, honestly. Because my practice is only anxiety and OCD, it's like one of the first questions I ask and parents are always like, "Oh, well yeah, why do you ask that? We're definitely having problems with sleep."
- Renee Jain: It's an obvious.

- Natasha Daniels: Yeah and I think most kids have ... Sometimes they have hiccups with sleep issues, but if you have anxiety you're almost definitely going to have some sleep disturbance. Across the board with age too. From little people all the way up to teenagers and adults. Sleep is a vulnerable time for anxious people.
- Renee Jain: Yeah, so you are seeing it across the board. And I am also seeing that in our community with people day after day saying, "Help us with the sleep. We're so desperate, we're so sleep deprived." But, I have also found paradoxically that there's so many people reaching out with sleep issues and challenges. Yet, so many people feel so alone or even shameful about it and I'm wondering if you see the same?
- Natasha Daniels: I do and I think it's something that people feel like they're failing as a parent. It's like one of those basic skills. If I can't get my child to sleep, what kind of parent am I? And then we do a lot of ninja tricks to survive like, just crawl in bed with me or I'm going to lay with you and I'm going to fall asleep in your small little twin bed. And we're embarrassed by that. So there's a lot of shame, I think, and guilt that maybe create that isolation.
- Renee Jain: Yeah, it's almost like you're wearing a badge of honor if your child sleeps through the night. Right? My child sleeps, does your child sleep? There is shame, but should there be shame?
- Natasha Daniels: No, I definitely don't think there should be. I'm sure you don't either. It's so common and there's really not much you can do as far as the initial sleep disturbance. That's not a reflection on your parenting if your child is having a hard time sleeping.
- Renee Jain: But why does it feel like a reflection on our parenting? Sorry, not to go off track, but why does it feel like I'm failing if my child doesn't sleep, do you think?
- Natasha Daniels: I don't know, I guess that's a really good question. Because, I get that as a mom and not a professional. I get that feeling of failure. And I think it's just one of those basic skills that maybe, moms compare notes with, like you said before. So, it's just one of those first things that you're not being able to say, "Oh yeah, my kid's a solid, solid sleeper."
- Renee Jain: Yeah. So, Natasha and I would like you to know that in our communities, which are sizeable, that there are ... almost everyone reaches out at some point or another with some sort of sleep issue. And it's not just from parents that have anxious children, right?
- Natasha Daniels: Right.
- Renee Jain: So, I first want everyone to know that they're not alone. You're not alone. And it's okay and it's why we're doing things like this summit and why we have

special people like Natasha here to help guide us. So, I'd love to get your opinion before we delve into some of the meat, on just co-sleeping in general. If co-sleeping, family beds, sleeping with your child, what's your take on that?

Natasha Daniels: Whenever I do an article, a podcast, or a YouTube video on sleep issues, I always preface it with co-sleeping is okay, family beds are okay ... if that's your intention. I am super respectful for whatever parental philosophy people have. Totally okay with that, that's not the deal. But a lot of the people, at least in my community and I think across the board, who have maybe anxious kids and maybe even non-anxious kids, they don't want to co-sleep, they don't want a family bed, but it's a coping mechanism and that's where the difference is.

Renee Jain: Yeah, so co-sleeping, family beds are okay if that's the intention. But, if it's not what you really wanted or that wasn't your philosophy and you're struggling with it then that's where we're here to help. So, you discuss myths. A lot of myths that are preventing families from working on sleep challenges. I was hoping that we could delve into some of those myths. What are they?

Natasha Daniels: Well here are a few, and I'm getting this just based on what I hear every day in my practice. A lot of people don't want to touch sleep, even though I think it's a front burner issue, if they don't want to do a family bed, but that's what's happening. They'll say, "It's just an age thing. It's just developmentally a struggle, but they're going to grow out of it.", and if they're coming in to my practice for anxiety, I'll tell them, "They're not going to grow out of it, so let's just cross that myth off our list because I work with"-

Renee Jain: I just heard about 1000 hearts break.

Natasha Daniels: I'm sorry.

Renee Jain: "What do you mean they're not going to grow out of it?"

Natasha Daniels: But I have hope. We have tools to talk about that are going to be helpful. I only tell parents that, not to be a Debbie Downer, but to say, "Look, please don't wait until they're 20 and they're not in college and they're in your bed", because I do work with kids who have that. They're young adults and they're still in their mom's beds. Don't wait for that to work on it. I think the wait and see approach, when they're out of toddler hood and they have anxiety ... because most of the kids I see who are really in the throes of real bedtime struggles, between the ages of 8 and 15, you really wanna roll up your sleeves and work on it.

Renee Jain: Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so, they're gonna grow out of it, is a myth. They probably will not grow out of it.

Natasha Daniels: Not if it's anxiety.

Renee Jain: Not if it's anxiety. What are some of the other myths?

- Natasha Daniels: A lot of times parents will say to me, "You know, Natasha, we've tried everything. I mean, we revamped their bedroom. Their bedroom is like Minecraft central. It is the coolest bedroom. I would wanna sleep in it if I could."
- Renee Jain: I can't imagine why my child doesn't wanna sleep in this bedroom. It's amazing, right?
- Natasha Daniels: Right. You probably hear that too.
- Renee Jain: Yeah, I think I did that for my kids.
- Natasha Daniels: So, there you go. You heard it yourself. That's gonna make a difference. If I think there're sharks in my bedroom, I don't care if there's Barbie all around the sharks. I'm still not gonna wanna sleep in there. So, I think feeling like you made it a beautiful place is missing the mark completely.
- Renee Jain: Okay. So, these are some of the myths ... I don't know if you have anymore that you wanna add.
- Natasha Daniels: Those are the two biggest ones.
- Renee Jain: Those are the two biggest ones. Okay, got it. And I've heard some things from you already with parents lying down in their kid's bed, and it's a twin bed and they're super uncomfortable. Right? So, there are a few things that I know that parents do that I have done myself. Which is, having your child fall asleep in your bed and kind of moving them from bed to bed. Or going into their bed and falling asleep. Can you talk about some of these different things? And if our goal, our intention is to have our child sleeping on their own, in their room, through the night. What those things do to help or hurt.
- Natasha Daniels: Sure. And I've done these things too. I think it's important for us to say, "These are the intentions." And I always say that. It's like, "Look, these are the goals. But it's okay if you're not there. It's okay if you do things that you know are gonna maybe exasperate the problem long term." Because, it's hard ... especially when you're tired. But, it's good to know what is maybe helpful and what is not helpful. Just so that when you feel like you have the energy, you can on it. I think one thing that we all do is that we lay down with our kids or we rub their heads and then pat their backs until they are fully asleep. That seems like great plan because, you can go and watch Netflix and it's gonna be really quick. But long term, that's not helpful. Because, they will wake up in the middle of the night and they will have a very startled reaction. Because, their moments were with you right next to them.
- So, instead of relaxing, kids become very hyper aroused and very sensitive. You know when you get up off the bed and you hear that creak and your kid's like,

"Where you going?", and you're like, "Ugh. I was almost out." That's because they're hyper aroused.

Renee Jain: No, you woke up!

Natasha Daniels: Yes so gosh! We're here for another 30 minutes.

Renee Jain: I wanna pause for a second and say that, at night when I lie down with my kids to read them a story, it's actually a really special time. Where we're connecting with on another and we're snuggling. And I know that might be hard for some parents to hear that, that is not something that they should do. So, can you clarify?

Natasha Daniels: Well, and I think they should do that. You wanna make sure, and this is kind of more of my OCD hat on, but you wanna make sure it's not very ritualistic. Like, I read you two books, and I kiss you on two cheeks, that kind of thing. I think you have to be really cognoscente of not being too routine oriented to the point where it's compulsive. But, I think it's important. I think that's really good cuddle. I think kids will tell you the most in that vulnerable space when they're laying.

Renee Jain: Yes, all of a sudden they just open up. It's amazing.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah, that's the time you're gonna get the juiciest stuff. So, I'm not saying don't do that. But I'm saying ... I'll give you an example. With my eight year old right now, and ... or we'll talk about this later. But, I'm sitting with him and when I get up, he's already half asleep. He's got his guided imagery on. And we'll talk about that in a minute. He's really relaxed, and I know he's still half up and I will say, "Okay, goodnight. I love you." I purposely bringing his awareness that I'm leaving. Which seems counterintuitive but, I want him to know that I'm going. And I want him to be somewhat half a sleep so he's learning how to be self reliant.

Renee Jain: So, I'm gonna tell you, I'm gonna take a guess of what's floating through the heads of many people who are listening right now. Oh my goodness, Natasha, I can not imagine a day where I will be able to do that. I mean, I feel like if I did that while my child was almost asleep, that would just freak them out. They would jump out of bed. And I would have to start the whole process over again. It seems overwhelming ... the goal.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. I think you take it in baby steps. Sleep is an ever evolving thing. It's not a cold that you get over. I really feel like, especially with kids with anxiety, it is a journey that will have many bumps. And you will go backwards depending on what they watched on TV and where they are developmentally. It's an ongoing thing. And there are times where you have to go all the way back to the beginning and start with really basic steps. I think, I guess the mentality is,

where can I push the limits a little bit? So, if I'm laying with my child and we're sleeping together ...

Let's just say, I am co-sleeping, don't wanna be, but I am. I'm holding my child's hand and I'm singing them to sleep. That is the level of intensity we are at. Then, my baby step would be, can I get her to sleep without holding her hand. That's it. So, start with one small step at a time. That's where I started with my oldest, my 14 year old. We started with that scenario of, I'm gonna just not hold your hand ... while you're breathing on my neck. Is that okay? Can we do that?

Renee Jain: And I know that there's another question that's coming which is, how long does that take then? How long from the process of saying, "Okay, I'm not gonna hold your hand.", to them sleeping on their own. Right? If you're going in baby steps.

Natasha Daniels: Well, I think it's kind of like putting a bandaid on a bullet hole. You really have to dress the bleeding. Horrible analogy but, you wanna get to the core. ... I know. I always say that and it's a horrible analogy. But, the sleeping issue is the symptom not the issue, it's not the problem. The problem is the fear that's related to the sleep. So, these are symptomatic things and how you're gonna handle the symptoms. But, until you address the core fear, I feel like you're still gonna be putting on band-aids. And, just to go back to what you asked. It can go pretty quick. I've seen kids really improve really fast if their anxiety is addressed.

Renee Jain: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). And is it also important that parents have their intention set in the right way? I've heard you talk about this before, right? ... A lot of parents will say they wanna end the co-sleeping, they want their kids out of their bed. But, how important is it that we have our goals and intentions set in advance of doing a process? Of undertaking this?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And I think it's really important to pause and think about your intentions before you even begin. Because, battling sleep issues is like going into a battle zone. And if you're not up for it, then you shouldn't even start from the beginning. Because, it's gonna take a lot of coffee and a lot of patience. And, if you're halfway through and you realize that you really don't have the intention, either your anxiety's gonna be peaked. There have been people who come into my practice and have worked really hard at focusing on helping the child leave the parent's bedroom. Because, that's what asked me to do. Only to find, the parent having a real hard time with it and actually going to sleep with the child.

Renee Jain: What are they having a hard time with? Can you dig into that a little bit for us?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. I think for some of the parents I've worked with, it's typically been the mom but, it doesn't have to be. Where there's been some other own childhood issues and their own anxiety, their own maternal anxiety. And they're worried about their child's safety. They'll say to me, "I'm so used to knowing that they're

okay because they're right next to me or because I'm right next to them, that I can't sleep. And so, I'm checking on them like multiple times a night."

Renee Jain: So, if it's one parent and not the other, that must also cause issues. Right?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah.

Renee Jain: There's a division in the goal and the core of the goals are different. Right?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah.

Renee Jain: So, how do we work on that? Let's say, one parent's okay with it and the other one, not so much. Where do we go from there?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And I think, that again, is somewhat of a separate issue. But, they overlap because, a lot of times I'll have a couple that'll come in and the mom will, "I'm okay with her sleeping in my bed. I'm not here for that. I want you to work on the anxiety." And the dad ... and not always this way but, more often it's this way. The dad will say, "I absolutely want you to work on her getting out of my bed. That's the number one priority." So, I'll say to them, "I can't work on sleep. Because, you guys are not aligned, you'll sabotage it. You have to be on the same page." Sometimes, they both seem like they're on the same page, but maybe one of them is driving it more. Maybe the one partner is driving it because, they don't like it. And then when we do get progress, we get that anxious parent who can't handle it.

Renee Jain: So, you have to work on your alignment with your partner, essentially first, before kind of beginning the process of trying to get your child sleeping in their own room, or in their own bed, or what have you.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And who does that? Who would even think to do that? Right? (laughing)

Renee Jain: And it's good to talk about openly, right? Because, I think that the other person might assume that you're on the same page. Well, of course we both want our children out of the bed ... is what might be going through your head. So, maybe you don't even know. Maybe we don't even know how the other person feels if we never talk about it.

Natasha Daniels: Exactly.

Renee Jain: I think we know, when it comes to a point of sleep deprivation, we're so exhausted it seems that, that would be the natural solution. If that's what's happening. If co-sleeping is leading to sleep deprivation. I think, if I had a partner and we're going through that situation I would be like, "Of course we both want this child out of our bed." So, I think just having an open conversation about it can probably just be eye opening. If nothing else, it can be eye opening. So, we're talking about fears, right? And kind of the underlying anxiety. And you

were talking about bullets and bleeding, and I know what you mean. That when we're treating symptoms and really not the underlying cause. I think the saying sometimes I go to is, fixing a leaky faucet when the house is burning down. Right?

Natasha Daniels: That's a better one.

Renee Jain: Right? So, you have to attend to the issues that are going on. So, what's going on with these kids when they're coming into their parents' room or they don't wanna sleep alone? I meet with a lot of parents, I know that you do as well, that say they don't know why their child is coming into their room. Right? So, let's talk about that.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. It's funny because it's such a huge problem, sleep. But yet, whenever or more often, when I ask a parent, "Why aren't they sleeping?". They'll look at me like, "Well, I don't know. They're just having a hard time sleeping." It's not common to dig and figure out what exactly is the struggle. We make a lot of assumptions because we all can relate to sleep issues. And so, I think we make assumptions like, "Well, they're just scared." And then I'll say, "But, scared of what?" And I'm not saying it in an accusatory way like, "What are they scared of?". It's just, do you really know specifically what they're scared of? Because, we're gonna work on that.

Renee Jain: Yeah.

Natasha Daniels: So, I generally see four categories of what the issue is. And it could be something else, but I tend to see four categories. I'm a really mentally organized person.

Renee Jain: We love categories. Give us the categories.

Natasha Daniels: I like categories, buckets, like, let's just organize this. So, I organize sleep issues into four categories. I'll just go over them, so you can get a broad picture of what I see, and I'm sure you see this too. Just fears. So, this could be fear of bad guys, fear of monsters, fear of aliens, fear of poltergeists. Those are the main four categories, my subcategories of fear. And then, I have kids who worry about dying. Because, I think that going to sleep is like a small little death. Like, we're gonna live eight to ten hours, if you're really lucky. And you're not gonna know what happened. So, death is a really common fear at sleep time.

Then, the third one I think is the fear of not being able to sleep. Which sounds ridiculous but, that's a really common anxiety.

Renee Jain: The anxiety of anxiety.

Natasha Daniels: Oh yeah.

Renee Jain: Yeah, you could think about it all day. Oh my goodness. Then I have to go through that again at night. And then I'm gonna have to go through that again, right? The fear of fear.

Natasha Daniels: Right.

Renee Jain: Yes, yes.

Natasha Daniels: So, I see that a lot. It's already 12:00, I'm not gonna be able to wake up. I'm gonna be tired all day. It's already 1:00. How many more hours do I have? That kind of thing. And the last one I think is just a racing mind. They're worried about tomorrow, they're worried about what they said today. It's all about, more of just those racing thoughts.

Renee Jain: Yeah, absolutely. So, we have fear of the boogie, basically, right?

Natasha Daniels: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Renee Jain: Fear of scary monsters, and aliens, and as you said, poltergeists. ... The mind racing, the fear of the fear. I missed one. What was the fourth one?

Natasha Daniels: Let's see, fear of sleeping, fear of dying-

Renee Jain: Oh, death. Right, dying at bedtime. Okay. Can you dig a little bit into that? What's going on with dying, with the fear of death and at bedtime?

Natasha Daniels: I think it's the loss of control. I think that, that is probably the core fear is, "I am an anxious person. I need to be in control over everything that's happening to me. And I'm going to lose control when I go to sleep." Now, I don't think kids can articulate that. I don't they consciously think that. But, I think that's what underneath the fear.

Renee Jain: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, we have these four buckets, right? And we're a parent, we're looking at our children. We're like, "Okay, you're having sleep issues." No matter if they're five, they're 10, they're 15, and Natasha, you work with kids of all ages in your practice, right?

Natasha Daniels: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Renee Jain: So, this can happen at all ages. Correct?

Natasha Daniels: Right.

Renee Jain: Okay. And so we have these buckets in our head. Are we guessing what's happening with our child? Or how do we figure out what they're experiencing?

- Natasha Daniels: Yeah, you never wanna guess. Because, even with my own kid, I always guess wrong. I mean, I assume it's obvious and then I'll ask and I am almost always wrong. So, we don't wanna make any assumptions, no matter what. Because, you just never know. So, I always say to kids, and it seems very trite, but it really helps. I always say, "What's the hardest part about sleep? What's the worst part about going to bed?" And initially I'll get a surface answer like, "I'm not tired.", or, "It's boring.", or, "I wanna stay up later." Just ignore those and keep going. Right? And then you might get some more surface meaty answers like, "Well, it's dark.", "It's alone." Okay, that's good. But then you wanna go down deeper. What's the worst part about it being dark? What's the worst part about you being alone?
- Renee Jain: Okay. So, when we're asking these questions, how much space do we give? Especially to a reluctant child to sort of answer? Right? So, it's like, "I don't know. I'm just tired." And you can tell they don't really wanna talk about it. How do we connect with them to get them to open up?
- Natasha Daniels: You're gonna have some that once you start going, they're gonna open up. And you're gonna have some like that who don't wanna talk to you. And you take what they give you. Out of my three kids, my son is like this. He'll give me a little gem, and I file it in his little folder in my brain, and I put a pause and I'll come back the next day. Or I might come back the next month. But, I'm collecting themes in my head.
- Renee Jain: Okay, got it.
- Natasha Daniels: So, this is not a one time conversation. Although, it can be, depending on your kid.
- Renee Jain: Okay. I can hear people being like, "Next months? No, no, no. I need to come back in five minutes.", But like, "Okay. Tell me more." I use, tell me more, a lot as well. Tell me more. Tell me more about that. Tell me more about what's going on. ... okay. So, we start to uncover. They will begin to give us these answers and we're not guessing anymore. Right?
- Natasha Daniels: Yeah.
- Renee Jain: So, we're helping them. Okay. So, let's go into to them, right? Let's say we figure out it's mind racing. If a child is saying to us, "Hold on. You know, I'm thinking about tomorrow and how I might have this big test, and am I gonna be ready for it? What if I sleep late and then if I don't wake up in time?", that's mind racing.
- Natasha Daniels: Right.
- Renee Jain: Then this is happening and then, oh my goodness. It's so late and I should be sleeping already. Okay so, how do we help them?

Natasha Daniels: Well, I think the first step is always educating your kids. I'm such a big proponent of teaching them why that's happening and why it's important to stop it. So, letting him know what mind racing is and letting him know that the more you think about these things, the more you're gonna stay up. Because, you're activating your brain. I kind of call it snowball thinking. It's like you have a worry and then you're growing the worry, and you're growing snowballs instead of going to sleep. So, once they get that, then you wanna tell them, "We need to change the channel in your brain. So, how are we gonna do that?" And then I give them some options, and that could be different.

My kids need literal guided imagery. They need someone to literally change the channel for them in their brain. There are some really good kids guided imagery. They love it and they go to sleep with it. And if they don't have it, they have a hard time.

Renee Jain: Okay, so that's wonderful. I love changing the channel. And that, to let kids know that they can intentionally do that. That you can actually change the channel in your brain. So, the first step was educating them and letting them know what's going on. And the second step is to help them sort of change the channel, and one tool that you can use is guided imagery. And I know we'll go a little bit more into that. What about that fear of not being able to go to sleep? How do we work on sort of that? Or maybe, the tools are similar?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah, I was gonna say, I feel like those two buckets are really similar. Because, it's again, letting them know that the more you worry about going to sleep, the more you're going to have a hard time going to sleep. And so, this is gonna seem very counter intuitive, but what I tell those kids and what I tell the parents of those kids is to say, "Don't try to go to sleep. Just lay there.", which seems really weird. And this is what I did actually with one of my kids. He'd say, "I'm not gonna go to sleep.", and I said, "Don't go to sleep, just lay there." And for some reason, having permission to not have to sleep is very relieving. And then I put the guided imagery on.

Renee Jain: Ah. Okay. So, talk to us about this guided imagery. So, what are you referring to? Is it like a CD? A CD ... I'm like, "What generation am I in?"

Natasha Daniels: Mine.

Renee Jain: It might be a CD. Is it a MP3? Is it a video?

Natasha Daniels: No. I try not to do anything that they're gonna watch. Because, the idea is we want them to be shutting their eyes and sleeping. In my house, it's on the iPad. I was taught how to lock the iPad. I didn't know how to do that before the music app. So, my sneaky kids can't go on the iPad and play games when I leave. But, you can download something from iTunes or where ever you consume your digital stuff. But, Lori Lite does some guided imagery for kids. My kids love that.

So, that's what they listen to, is like Indigo Dreams. I have other people that are older or they think, maybe that's a little bit too babyish. And they'll use the Calm app or something like that. There's so many out there. But, I think that the idea is to find something that is for sleep. Indigo Dreams is for sleep and so, it's telling a story but it's teaching breathing and it's doing muscle relaxation through the story, and the kids don't even know it. I like that.

Renee Jain: So, I have a question, right? Because, earlier we had talked about, we were talking about holding hands and not holding hands because you don't want it to be a crutch. And you don't want your child to become hyper vigilant when they wake up and kind of needing that. How is this different?

Natasha Daniels: Well, it's self reliant. So, there's a beautiful thing about that. Because, I have gotten it to the point, most of the time, where if my kids wake up and they have a bad dream or they just wake up, they press play and they listen to their music and they go back to bed on their own. That's beautiful. Also, adults even do this. Sometimes if I'm having a rough day, I put my rain on in my ears and it's raining in my head. It feels relaxing and I go back to bed. So, it's a healthy coping mechanism versus I need my mom to hold my hand while I sleep. It's [inaudible 00:30:34] more typical coping mechanisms for sleep.

Renee Jain: Okay, got it. And I wanna be cognizant that I didn't go over the other two buckets, right? I went into guided imagery because I'm like, "I've heard it a few times now. I wanna talk about that." ... So, we talked about mind racing and fear of not being able to go to sleep. And then there was dying at bedtime, right? So, the death thing. How do we work on that? What do we do to help our kids with that?

Natasha Daniels: Well, that one's a really tricky one. You kind of have to address the fear of death in general. And so, that's a whole nother summit. But I think, going into the fear of death, what they are afraid of, and talking about that. That's a totally separate issue that you want to dive deep into with a therapist, or with books, or whatever. But, again, you're gonna go into, is it helpful to have these snowball thoughts? And we don't wanna be thinking about dying when we're going to bed. That's not helpful. That's gonna make you anxious and you're gonna stay up. So, teaching your kids to be aware of their thoughts is really important.

Renee Jain: So, we have this other fear that we have mentioned. Right? One of the other buckets, which is fear of monsters, and bad guys, and aliens. How do we conquer that one?

Natasha Daniels: And I think, you still again wanna ask some really specific questions about that. So, we don't wanna stop with just the fear of bad guys or monsters. I wanna get as much detail as possible. I'll give you an example from my own life. Because, I always like to talk about my own life and my own anxious kids. So, just to walk you through how this would look ... So, my Mr. Eight is an anxious guy and he

was having a hard time with going to bed. And I said, "Well, what's the worst part about going to bed?" And he said, "Well, I'm afraid of my window." And so, that was very specific. But I didn't leave it with that. So, it wasn't like, "You're fine." I didn't just tell him to get over it. Well, what's the worst part about your window? What can happen with your window?

Well, bad guys can come through my window. We have a very tall house. We have vaulted ceilings and his bedroom it's ... And I don't know math but, it's like a 20 foot drop from his bedroom window to the floor or to the bottom of the house. And he's eight and seems to be pretty intelligent. So I said, "How can a bad guy get up your window?" And he said, "Well, they can take a plunger, and they can take two plungers, and they can walk up the wall."

Renee Jain: Oh, that's very creative.

Natasha Daniels: I know. It was very cartoonish. And I think a lot of kids will have a lot of cartoonish ideas of how bad guys can get in. And I hear that a lot in practice too. Like, they can saw through and make a circle in my ceiling and come through. I hear that kind of stuff all the time. But when you have an older kid, you can do some cognitive reframing. You can rationalize it and you can say, "Let's talk about how that doesn't make sense." So, then we got a plunger and I went out into the back and I tried to stick it to the wall. And I said, "Is this working?" I even took a ladder out. Actually, my husband did, took a ladder out and he showed him, physically how much more space would be required to get to his window. Now, we did all that so that when he went to bed at night we can remind him, "Remember the plunger? Remember the ladder? You are the safest upstairs."

Renee Jain: Okay. Okay, got it. I hear parents, as a knee-jerk response, often reassuring their children. Saying, "You're gonna be okay. You're safe. I'm here, I make is safe for you." Can we talk a little bit about that? Is that okay? Is it not okay?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. That's a really good point. Because, I think that it's such good typical parenting to reassure our kids. And it's really common to say, "You're safe. We're right here."

Renee Jain: It just feels natural to say it, you know? Because, that's how we feel, that we're protecting them.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And who would not wanna say that to their kids? But you shouldn't. Because, in a weird way, it's conveying to them that you're keeping them safe. And you're keeping them safe from what? And so, it's better to say, "We are all safe in the house." So that there's no codependency of, mom and dad are right here. Your fine, we're right here.

Renee Jain: Right. 'Cause then you might start thinking, "Well, how far away are you?", and, "What if you're not there?", "What if you're downstairs, or upstairs?", or

whatever the situation is with the configuration of the sleeping in the house. Right?

Natasha Daniels: Right. Are you going to bed? When are you going to bed? Because, that's a big anxiety I hear a lot with kids. When are you going to sleep? Because, I wanna make sure I'm asleep before you go to bed. You're guarding the door.

Renee Jain: Do you have any tips for sort of practicing patience, and extending our patience, and kind of self care for us, especially when we're depleted. Right? Because, if this happens day in after day out, and night after night, it can be exhausting right? Let's be honest.

Natasha Daniels: It can. No, no, it can be completely exhausting. I was up, 3 O'clock this morning because my kid has bad dreams and couldn't go back to bed. So, even when this is what you do for a living, you're gonna be exhausted. Or, I'm gonna be exhausted. I think the important thing is to know your limits. So, if your ultimate goal is to have your kids sleep independently, and they're not there yet, it's okay. Find that little zone where you're pushing them out of their comfort zone, but you're not killing yourself. So that, there's some success. And I think self care, as cheesy as that sounds, is really important. Taking care of yourself and making sure that you recharge is really, really important.

Renee Jain: Sometimes when I get depleted, my natural thoughts in my head, not the ones that I say, for the most part, goes to control ... and some of them, that some people would be surprised to hear would be fear based. Right? In my head, the thoughts going through my head are, "You better sleep or else." You know? Talk to me about that. Because, we were talking about buckets of fear. Right? And sometimes, on top of that fear we add another layer of fear. Which is like, "You better sleep or ..."

Natasha Daniels: Yeah.

Renee Jain: Yeah, what happens there?

Natasha Daniels: Now, do you mean, what we say to them or our own-

Renee Jain: I'm saying, what happens to parents when their child isn't sleeping night after night. And sometimes we add on another layer of fear for them. Which is like ... sleep or here's the consequence.

Natasha Daniels: Yeah, your common parenting. I think, we move into punishment mode pretty quickly when it comes to sleep. Because, normally we're at our own end, at night time. It's kind of our time. And so, it almost feels like they're infringing into our recharge moment. And so, I think in a lot of old school parents too, and even non-old school parents, you just go back into like, you're gonna lose electronics, or ... I'm gonna close all your doors, and it's gonna get dark, and it's gonna be scary. So, I think the key is to know that, that's not gonna work. So,

ultimately, you still wanna address the core issue underneath it. So, you really wanna give them coping mechanisms. Then sometimes, reinforcers can help as an added bonus. But, I've never really seen consequences work long term.

Renee Jain: And we're gonna get to reinforcers in just a moment but, I think that these kids want to sleep. Right? It's not that they don't wanna sleep. They wanna sleep too. Everyone wants to, they see it as a skill eventually, of course. And you can just straight up tell them that sleep is a skill. And every child that I have ever met, at any age, wants to master their skills. We come into the world wanting to master them. So, they do wanna sleep. I think just being aware that, it's okay to have the thought. But, it doesn't need to be verbalized. A lot of times when we're depleted, like anyone, there are things that go through our mind that we don't mean. Right? And that are exaggerated. So, I think that your point is great. To try to take care of ourselves and really ... just try to empathize with them as much as possible. That they're trying.

Natasha Daniels: Right. And I think it's also important to be kind with yourself. Because, we're gonna say things in the heat of the moment that we're gonna regret. And we're human, and you're tired, and especially in the middle of the night, you're the most vulnerable.

Renee Jain: Oh yeah.

Natasha Daniels: Forgiveness to yourself and even modeling it to your kids. I can't tell you how many times I've had to say to my kids, "I'm really sorry that Mommyzilla came out last night. ... That was not cool. I know you were scared and I know I was tired, and I was worried I wasn't gonna get enough sleep. And I know I barked at you, and I'm sorry about that." Just modeling humanness is a great thing anyway.

Renee Jain: Yeah, absolutely. I think, I don't know if someone once said, "You should never apologize to your kids." But, I know that there are people who believe that you shouldn't make apologies to your kids. Because, I don't know if it's they feel it's a sign of weakness. But, I absolutely apologize to my kids when I haven't been kind. And it does happen. And they see that and they see the humanity in it. And that mom isn't perfect but, she's able to communicate about it. And I feel like it's great modeling. And frankly, I do. It hurts, when I've done something like that. Obviously, some of it is also to alleviate a little bit of my own guilt. But mostly, I want them to know that I'm human, I make mistakes, and that when I do, I like to communicate about it. So, thank you for bringing that up.

Now, I know that you also talk about some of the things that we can do to kind of set up our child for success when it comes to sleep and their room. And we've talked a little bit about guided imagery. But, what are some of the other things that we can do in the room?

- Natasha Daniels: There's a lot you could do in the room. So, you just wanna think about your senses and go through the things that your child is going to kind of experience when they're in their rooms. So, light and noise are two of the main things that kids will constantly complain about. So, if there's something scary in the room, ask them, "Is there anything scary in your room?" I can't tell you how many times people have come in and have had sleep issues. And the child will say to me, "That doll that my mom had as a child that's sitting on my counter, it freaks me out."
- Renee Jain: That description freaks me out, so I understand.
- Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And I'm like, "Well, why don't you just tell her to move it?" And it's like, "Well, I don't wanna hurt her feelings." or, "It's not that bad during the day." So, there's a lot of times ... Don't assume that there aren't things in your child's room that freak them out at night or create shadows that are upsetting.
- Renee Jain: And this can be even if they're sleeping in your room still, correct?
- Natasha Daniels: Oh yeah. You might have something really freaky or maybe like, your dresser looks like something when it is dark in there.
- Renee Jain: I know parents are always weary of suggesting things. Right? So, when they have a conversation with their child about trying to figure out if there is something in the room, how do they go about that conversation?
- Natasha Daniels: Yeah, I think you wanna ask directly, and you can say, "Is there anything in your room that I could do differently? Is there anything that you want me to add or remove?" So, you're being very general. Anything that freaks you out that we can remove. Anything that would make you feel more comfortable. So, balancing it sometimes takes a little bit of that suggestibility out of it.
- Renee Jain: Okay. Okay, thank you.
- Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And then I think, there's a lot of controversy, I guess, about too much light. A lot of times I get a little bit of push back with parents when I say, "More light is okay." If we're taking baby steps, the more they can see, the better. And so, a good night light is good but, a good night light could be bad if it casts too many shadows. So, a lot of times people are worried about their circadian rhythm and too much exposure to light, and they don't sleep well. But, I've had times where my kids are sleeping with the entire room light on. And that's a period of time. And then we progress and we get a smaller night light. But, light is a big, big deal. Because, the darkness is scary and unknown.
- Renee Jain: Yes, yes. Especially if it's pitch black. I mean, you can't see, you lose your other senses. Right? Yeah. Okay, so, I am hearing, environment in the room. Like if

there are any scary things removed, lighting, right? And you said, senses. So, I'm thinking there're other senses that we're thinking about.

Natasha Daniels: Yep. And then you wanna move into sound. The darker it is, the my hypersensitive you are gonna be to sound. And so, there is a correlation there. But I think, the best thing you can do is put some noise in that room. So, if you have guided imagery, that can do it, in and of itself. A sound machine, that just has white noise can help. Or just sounds. You really want to go through it with your child. Because, I find that every kid is unique and different. But at night, they're going to be listening to that ice machine that's dumping ice, or the house is creaking or settling. It's happening all the time, but at night you just notice these noises more. We want some sort of sound screen, whatever that can be, to help that child not be hypersensitive.

Renee Jain: Okay. Wonderful. When we're making changes like this, do we make them all at once? Is that okay? What do we do?

Natasha Daniels: It depends on your child. Some kids are very sensitive to too much change at one time. But, if you engage them and you partner with them, and you say to them, "I want sleep to be better for you. I know you're tired. We're gonna get to your core fear. We're gonna talk about what scares you the most. But then, how can we fix your room up?" They tend to get excited about that. They're excited about their night light. They're excited about what they can listen to. And so, sometimes it's not a bad thing to change their room all at once. You have to take your child's lead.

Renee Jain: Okay. How do we set this up as a goal that doesn't feel like they're being graded every night? You know what I'm saying?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah.

Renee Jain: I feel like sometimes, even my kids, I have a child ... one of my daughter's is sleep challenged. She has been, she's five and a half, since she was born. Sometimes she'll wake up and I'm shocked. Sometimes she'll say, "Did I do well?", or, "Did I do good?" And I'm like, "What is she talking about, "You know, I slept." As if she's getting a report card each morning. It really hit home when she did that to me one day. Wow, I must be talking about it a lot. So, how do we not do that to our kids?

Natasha Daniels: Yeah. And I think that's really tricky. I think it's by celebrating the small little steps even. If they're going to bed easier, that maybe they wake up in the middle of the night, then you highlight in the morning, "You know what, you really went to bed a lot quicker than you normally do, and that's awesome." Another thing is also put it on them. Are you proud of yourself? I'm not proud of you, it's about you being proud of yourself. You know? How do you think you did? That was really cool. You were really brave last night? So, I think it's just changing the language around.

- Renee Jain: And I think you said something at the beginning that, especially when you're dealing with an anxious child, sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back. And so, we really maybe need to acknowledge that look, this is a work in progress and sometimes we do have bad nights. And it's okay.
- Natasha Daniels: Yeah. Yeah, and maybe thinking it, so that they can understand their own connections. If you have an anxious kid, you're gonna have moments no matter what age, where their sleep gets disturbed. And I think it's linking it. I'll always talk to my kids and I'll say ... Well, my eight year old, he watched the entire series of Harry Potter, which I thought was okay. Because, he said he was mature and he was ready for it. But, the last two nights reflect that he was not ready. And so, we'll have a dialogue about it. And so, in the morning I'll say, "It seems like maybe Harry Potter was a little scary for you."
- And he'll say, "You know, it was but I'm working through it. He talks like a therapist. It's not gonna scare tonight, because I thought about it. And we went into the special effects and how it impacted him, and is it real or not real, and having made it. And then he said, "I think good for tomorrow." So, you're constantly having conversations about it, instead of, "Did you do good or did you do bad?" And also, I always use myself. If I watch something scary, I'm not gonna sleep well. It's a human thing, not a kid thing.
- Renee Jain: Yes, yes. Absolutely. This has been amazing. You have given us so many valuable pieces of information, Tasha. So, I have two more quick questions for you. First of all, a tough one but, if someone was going to just remember one thing from this conversation, take away one piece of inspiration from you, what would that be?
- Natasha Daniels: I think it would be, don't be hard on your child because they're trying to sleep. And don't be hard on yourself. Because, we're all just trying to do the best that we can.
- Renee Jain: Aw. I love that. Thank you. And where can we find out about your wonderful work?
- Natasha Daniels: My main place where I hangout is at anxioustoddlers.com, and it's for everybody. Don't let the name fool you.
- Renee Jain: It is for everyone. It's amazing. I consume a lot of that information and I love it. And as you can see, Natasha is amazing, super down to earth, very knowledgeable. And so, I highly recommend anxioustoddlers.com. Thank you so much for being with us here and giving us all of these gems of information.
- Natasha Daniels: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.
- Renee Jain: Thank you very much. You're very welcome.