

Stoplight Alarm Clock tells toddlers it's OK to start the day

Local moms find innovative way to keep kids from being early risers

By Lauren Bishop • lbishop@enquirer.com • May 24, 2010

When Allison Gordon's twins were 2 years old, there was one thing the Blue Ash resident could count on. They would wake up at 5 a.m. every day - and so would she.

The exhausted mom tried to teach her toddlers to stay in bed until the clock said 7 a.m., but they'd get up when they saw the number seven anywhere on the display - 5:07 a.m., for example. She tried taping over the minutes and went online in search of a clock for toddlers, but found nothing.

"I thought, 'The heck with it,'" she says. "I'm going to make one."

After discussing the problem with friend and fellow mom Sherri Friedman of Amberley Village, they came up with the solution: A clock that looks like a stoplight that would glow red when kids are supposed to stay in bed and green when it's OK to get up. The yellow light could serve as a nightlight.

"Kids at that age don't know how to tell time, but they understand their colors," Friedman says. "And they understand that red means stop and green means go. And we thought, 'Oh my gosh, that's it.'"

Sleep-deprived parents can now buy Gordon and Friedman's Stoplight Alarm Clock for \$29.99-\$34.99 through their new website, www.stoplightclock.com; two local stores, Best for

Babies in Silverton and Treehouse Kids in Springdale; and websites including Amazon.com and www.onestepahead.com.

But it took Gordon, 40, and Friedman, 42, more than five years to make their alarm clock dream a reality, even though both had helpful career backgrounds. Gordon had been the product director for a Milford-based gift company called New Creative Enterprises, and Friedman had worked in marketing and public relations for Sive/Young & Rubicam in Cincinnati and Edelman Public Relations in Chicago.

After leaving the corporate world to become stay-at-home moms, they also started their own not-for-profit organizations: Gordon is one of the founders of Ride Cincinnati, an annual bike ride that raises money for breast cancer research in memory of her mother. Friedman co-founded Most Valuable Kids of Greater Cincinnati, which distributes unused tickets to sports and cultural events to disadvantaged kids. Both are volunteer positions.

Despite their hectic schedules, they decided to devote the time to add "inventor" to their résumés.

"Allison and I both are doers," Friedman says. "We didn't want to be those people who opened up a catalog and said, 'Why didn't I do that?'"

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Their first step was to show sketches for the clock to focus groups of friends and family members and to the publishers of the Chicago-based One Step Ahead baby product catalog. They got enough positive feedback to pursue making a prototype.

But the inventors' first design for their clock, and the quality of the finished product from a factory in China, didn't meet their standards and never made it to store shelves. So they came up with a better design and partnered with Cincinnati-based CustomQuest to manufacture, import and distribute the clocks.

Then they brought a new prototype to a large trade show of children's products in Las Vegas, where multiple vendors expressed interest. It received a Mom's Best Award - given after evaluations by real moms - in 2008, before the clock was even widely available.

"We were getting all these green lights, no pun intended," Gordon says. "We were just thrilled."

The inventors have sold about 2,000 clocks to date with no advertising or marketing, only through word-of-mouth and through Internet searches from tired parents of toddlers.

Toy industry expert Jim Silver, an editor of website www.timetoplaymag.com, says he's never seen a product like the Stoplight Alarm Clock, which he recently featured on the online social TV network MomTV.com.

"We had an overwhelming reaction from moms when we showed it," he says. "They just loved the whole concept."

That came as no surprise the inventors.

"There isn't a mom with a 2- to 4-year-old who doesn't have a sleep deprivation issue. It's the No. 1 complaint among parents," Friedman says.

And the clock helps kids as well as their sleep-deprived parents, the inventors say.

"What we love about it from a parenting standpoint is that it's really empowering the child to make the decision and to be responsible," Friedman says. "They get so proud of the fact that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing."

The clock now comes with different sculpted figures resting against the stoplight: Teddy bears (one in pink pajamas and one in blue) and cars (one with a girl driver and one with a boy driver, which is currently sold out but expected to ship next month).

Eventually, Friedman and Gordon hope to acquire character licenses, envisioning Disney or Sesame Street characters perched next to their stoplights, or sell their design outright to a large toy company.

The inventors' only regret is that their kids are now too old for their mothers to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

"It took us so long to make that my kids are 10 now," Gordon says, adding with a laugh: "All our siblings and friends are going to benefit and we suffered."

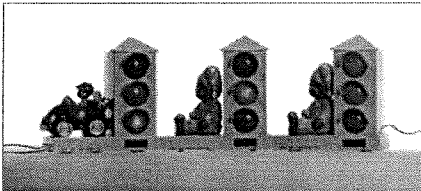
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The Enquirer/Jeff Swinger
Sherri Friedman of Amberley Village (left) and Allison Gordon
of Blue Ash are inventors of the award winning product
called the Stoplight Alarm Clock.




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The Enquirer/Jeff Swinger
The Stoplight Alarm Clock comes in several designs. The
lights on the clock tell a child to stay in bed (red) or that it's
time to get up (green). Yellow serves as a night light.

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