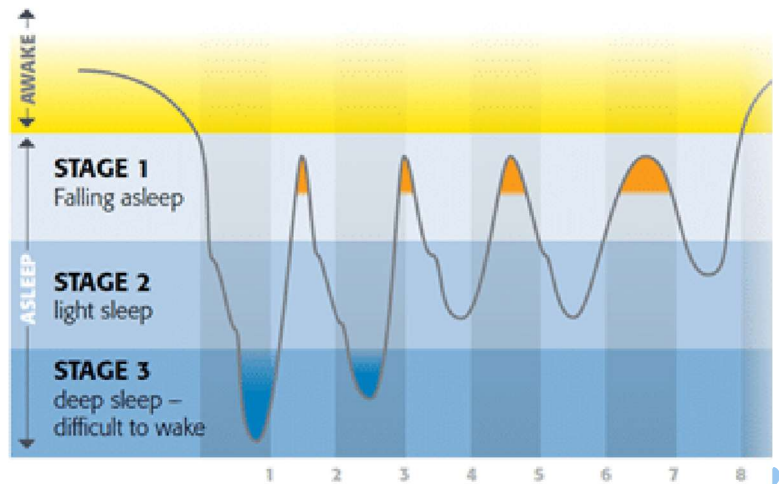


Sleep Hygiene

This guide contains information on sleep, what causes sleep problems and various strategies to overcome these difficulties.

How does sleep work?

There are different stages of sleep that make one complete cycle, each cycle is 60-90 minutes and happens many times throughout the night. Between stages we may partially wake up and go back to sleep but if a child hasn't learnt to settle themselves they may wake fully. Night terrors and bad dreams normally happen when going from deep to lighter sleep, children may scream and panic but avoid waking your child during a night terror.



What causes sleep difficulties?

- Physical disability can mean children find it harder to get comfortable or experience discomfort and wake during the night. They may also wake if they can't move independently and need to be turned in the night.
- Children with visual impairments may miss cues for night and day and children with hearing impairment may become anxious and feel isolated when they remove hearing aids at night.
- Neurological conditions like cerebral palsy or epilepsy may also affect the brain's sleep wake cycle.
- Some medication can cause sleeplessness.
- Communication difficulties could mean the child finds it difficult to understand why they need to sleep.

What causes sleep disturbances?

- If your child can't self-soothe, they'll wake more frequently.
- Physical feelings: being over-tired, discomfort, illness or pain, being hungry or thirsty or their nappy needing changing can all wake a child.
- Too much sugary food during the day
- Bad dreams or night terrors
- The sleeping environment: changes to the sleep environment, the temperature, noise (if they're sensitive to noise).

It is important to get medical advice to ensure there is not a physical reason.



Autism:

Children with autism are frequently affected by a disturbed sleep pattern. They might have difficulty going to sleep, wake frequently for no clear reason or only need a few hours' sleep.

Some children don't produce enough melatonin, a chemical our brain makes to help us sleep at night, that is made in the evening when it's dark. Putting your child to sleep in a darkened room and avoiding screens up to an hour before bed can help melatonin to be produced. In some cases, melatonin can be prescribed but this will need to be discussed with the health professionals involved in your child's care and even with this you should still keep up a good bedtime routine.

Keeping a sleep diary:

This can be a really useful way to find out what triggers poor sleep behaviour and what helps. To better understand their sleeping patterns it's helpful to keep this over a two week period.

The diary can also help other professionals involved in your child's care to better understand your child's sleep patterns. It can also provide evidence when applying for benefits, e.g. Disability Living Allowance.

Sleep Diary

Date:							
Time of waking in the morning							
Mood upon waking							
Times of naps during the day							
Time started preparing for bed							
What time did the child go to bed?							
What time did the child get to sleep?							
Time(s) of waking during the night (eg 1:30, 2:00 am...)							
What did you do?							
Length of time taken to fall asleep again							
Total number of hours of sleep							

A word of reassurance:

Whichever changes you choose to make it's common for your child's behaviour to improve and then get worse before getting better. It is important to be firm and stick to the routine to make the changes. It may take a while but persevering will help the changes work over time.



Bedtime routines:

A bedtime routine is a set of activities your child finds relaxing which happen every night at the same time in the same order. They help with settling, sleep disturbances, sleeping alone difficulties & bedtime refusal. Consider using visual schedules for your child to follow the routine. All family members and/or carers who put the child to bed should follow the same routine.

- Put your child to bed at the same time each night and wake them at the same time each morning.
- Make day naps age-appropriate and schedule them in. Check they are not hungry or thirsty and have gone to the toilet before bed.
- Avoid screens for 1 hour before bed.



The routine needs to fit in with everyday life and be made enjoyable, ideally, it'll take 30 mins, but this depends on the child, it can be 4-5 calming activities e.g.

- Relaxation time – when your child has undivided attention, e.g. colouring, jigsaws but avoid stimulating activity.
- Certain foods help sleep, such as warm milk but avoid sugary foods.
- Bath time – you can add lavender oil or calming bath soaks
- Story time – or a song or music
- Settle in bed – tucked in to bed.
- Goodnight kiss or phrase – e.g. “Goodnight, sleep tight, see you in the morning”. Your child will understand from this that it is time to settle down and sleep

It's common for children to recognise when it's time for bed and object to/avoid it. Keep calm and continue with the routine as it will help your child to settle more easily in the future. To help them understand the bedtime routine you can use:

- Objects, pictures, signs or symbols like Makaton or PECS.
- Toys to act out the bedtime routine to help your child
- become familiar with it.
- Social stories.



Environmental changes

Make the bedroom a relaxing place:

It helps to make your child's bedroom a safe, calm and pleasant place to be, it's also important the child thinks it is a comfortable, relaxing place. In the day, try to avoid sending them to their room as a punishment.

Sound and vision:

- Calming background music may help them to relax (but needs to stay on through the night). Reduce noise coming into the room by placing your child's bed as far away from noise sources as possible.
- Avoid TV, iPads, mobile phones, computer screens or play stations for at least one hour before bedtime, as the blue light from these screens can disrupt your child's sleep rhythm.

Light and colour:

- Where possible, decorate with pale shades which are less stimulating than bright colours.
- Blackout linings can help if the room is too bright.
- A night light that glows softly can help if your child feels it's too dark.

Temperature:

- Check the room temperature, is it too hot or cold for your child?
- Aromatherapy night lamps may help to create a relaxing environment but you should consult your GP as it may not be suitable for children with epilepsy.
- If your child can't regulate their body temperature well e.g. if they have night sweats, you can use cooling gel supports, sheets or pillows of special material may help.

Furniture and equipment:

- Avoid too much furniture, stimulating toys and games but do include a few favourite pictures, posters and cuddly toys.
- Some children will be more comfortable with a duvet but others may prefer a blanket. An occupational therapist can help you with equipment to help your child sleep including beds and mattresses etc. A weighted blanket can help some children to feel less anxious and help them to sleep but only use this on the advice of an OT.
- If your child wakes and moves around the house an alarm may be helpful, care assistant alarms can be either on a doorway or under a bed and wake you immediately.
- If your child is anxious to sleep there's a number of things you could try, e.g. a 'monster spray' to spray under the bed and around the bedroom to banish monsters, or 'worry dolls' or 'dream catchers'.
- If your child has behavioural problems, prepare the bedroom and remove anything they may hurt themselves on.

Changing sleeping patterns

Moving bedtime forward (chronotherapy):

This includes a range of techniques to move the sleep patterns to a desired time to increase average sleep time and decrease sleep disturbance used if your child stays awake after 1am:

1. Chronotherapy involves carefully and consistently delaying your child's bedtime and waking time each day whilst maintaining a regular schedule during waking hours.
2. This method works best with a structured bedtime routine and calm down time.
3. Move the bedtimes and wake times forward by three hours each time (please note, this means sleeping in the day during the process so school holidays are usually the best time to try).
4. Using bright light in the evening will help delay the body clock.

Example:

- Day 1: Sleep 4 am – 12 midday,
- Day 2: Sleep 7 am – 3 pm,
- Day 3: Sleep 10 am – 6pm,
- Day 4: Sleep 1 pm – 9pm,
- Day 5: Sleep 4pm – 12 midnight,
- Day 6: Sleep 7pm – 3am,
- Days 7-13: Sleep 10pm – 6am,
- Days 14+: Sleep 11 pm – 7am.

Moving bedtime backwards (phase advancement)

You would use this technique if your child is having difficulty falling asleep at a desired time, but is settling before 1am.

First decide on an appropriate bedtime and waking time based on your child's sleep needs (these are individual for the child and you may need to speak to a Sleep Practitioner to help with this). This is what you are aiming for:

1. If you need to make changes to get to these times, do so by 15 minutes each day (or at a slower pace if needed).
2. Using bright light in the morning can help advance the body clock.





Example:

- If your child is put to bed at 8pm, and doesn't sleep until 11pm, you would start by putting them to bed at 11pm (with a calm down routine before), and then gradually make these times earlier by 15 minutes each day, until you get to a more reasonable time. If your child is taking longer than 15/20 minutes to settle, you may want to keep the time consistent for a few days before moving the time again.



Daytime naps

Many children will benefit from a daytime nap until they are two, sometimes three years old. Some older children with disabilities who use a lot of energy in the day may also need a daytime nap. It's important to monitor the situation as having a day nap may mean your child is not tired at night.

Age	Daytime sleep	Nighttime sleep
 3 months	5 hours	10 hours
 12 months	2.5 hours	11.5 hours
 3 years	1 hour	11 hours
 6 years	None	10.5 hours
 9 years	None	10 hours

How much sleep does my child need?
Every child is different, so use this table as a guide.
The amount of sleep a child needs reduces by around 15 minutes for each year after age 9.

Reducing daytime naps:

You can experiment by reducing how much your child sleeps in the day to see if this helps them sleep better at night. Each child is different and as they grow the number of hours of sleep they need changes.

- If your child is having a regular nap each day, don't cut this out straight away. Reduce the nap time by 5 minutes each time (e.g. each week) until the nap is cut out altogether.
- To reduce nap times you can either delay the start time or wake them a bit earlier (to suit meal time/nursery/school runs etc). Try to keep the nap times fairly consistent (e.g. don't let them nap in the morning one day, and then afternoon the next).
- If your child is in school make the school aware that you are using this process to reduce naps and ask them to follow it.
- Keep bedtimes and wake times the same so that consistency in overnight sleep times supports this process.



Strategies to Overcome Bad Habits

Reward good behaviour:

If good behaviour is rewarded it's more likely to happen again. This reward can be anything your child likes such as praise, a hug or attention, if possible ask your child what they would like. Even if they display challenging behaviours after they get the reward do not take the reward away as it's important they know the reward was achieved and earned.

Younger children and those with a learning disability often need rewards quite quickly to have an impact so it's good where possible to give them the reward soon e.g. the next day they can choose a TV programme to watch. One thing to note is that some children may get bored of the reward system so the rewards may need to be changed to keep them motivated.

Reward charts:

Star charts can reward good behaviour, to do this make a chart which shows all the days of the week, place it somewhere everyone can see it and show it to people who visit. Each day your child is given a goal and if they achieve it they are given a star. At first start with simple goals, (e.g. going to the bedroom when asked) and gradually set more demanding ones (e.g. staying in bed once you have left the room). Once your child has a set number of stars, reward them with an activity they enjoy. An example below:

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Take a bath	★	★	★	★	★
Wear pajamas	★	★	★	★	★
Brush my teeth	★	★	★	★	★
Turn off the lights	★	★	★	★	★
My reward for the week:					



Avoiding bad bedtime habits:

It's normal for children to sometimes wake at night and seek your attention. If your child wakes in the night soothe them briefly with as little touching as possible, repeat your 'goodnight phrase' and leave them in their bed. It's tempting to let your child into bed with you rather than return them to their room but over time it can be difficult to persuade them to sleep in their own room. Try not to send them to their bedroom as a punishment in the day otherwise they may associate their room with punishment, instead try to encourage good behaviour.

Changing bad habits:

Choose a time that's appropriate when you feel you can enforce the changes for at least two weeks e.g. avoid times when you may go on holiday. It may also be important to have additional support if possible like a friend or other family members.

Crying at bedtime:

Sometimes children cry for attention because they don't want to sleep, it may be difficult to know whether your child is distressed or wants attention because they may be crying due to physical discomfort it's not advised to not go to them at all. It can be hard to leave your child to cry but if you go to them straight away they will learn that crying is a way to avoid bedtime and get your attention.

Gradual retreat:

If your child starts to cry try to delay going straight away and go in after 2-5 minutes (less if you feel distressed). Gently resettle them with as little touch as possible and instead say your 'goodnight phrase' and leave. If the crying persists go back at regular intervals of 25 minutes and go through the same resettling routine. In the beginning you may have to go in a few times but over time your child will eventually fall asleep themselves.

If your child comes out of their room take them back immediately without eye contact or talking and gently resettle them, repeat the goodnight phrase and leave, if they come out again just repeat this.

If your child wants you in the room:

If your child is used to having you in the room and is distressed when you leave, you can gradually help them to get used to you not being in the room. To start, sit next to them and avoid getting into bed with them/cuddling them to sleep. Try and avoid eye contact and conversation, if this is difficult reading a book/magazine may help. Every 3 days gradually increase the distance between you and your child (e.g. sit a bit further away from the bed, stand in the doorway, stand outside) until you no longer need to be there for them to sleep.



Other organisations to support with sleep:

The Children's Sleep Charity

For further resources on sleep and diet and how to make a relaxing bedroom and other tips.

Website: <https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/>

The National Autistic Society

Information, advice and support for autistic people

Website: www.nas.org.uk

Scope: Sleep solutions

Information and advice for people affected by physical disabilities with more information and tips.

Contact: helpline@scope.org.uk

Tel: 0808 800 3333

Website: <https://www.scope.org.uk>

Sense

Sleep information for parents of children who are deaf and/or blind.

Website: <https://www.sense.org.uk/>

Council for Disabled Children

The Early Support Sleep Guide, contains more detailed information.

Website: www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

Cerebra

Further resources and advice service where you can access 1.1 phone support for sleeping difficulties.

Website: <https://cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service/>

Helpline (freephone): 0800 328 1159

Parenting NI

General information on a range of things, including difficult behaviours.

Website: <https://www.parentingni.org/>

Contact a Family:

Contact a Family is a UK charity that provides support and information to families with disabled children, whatever the condition or disability.

Website: <https://contact.org.uk/>

Helpline (free): 0808 808 3555

Organisations to support with equipment for your child:

Living Made Easy

Impartial information and advice on equipment to assist your child at home. Including baby monitors, beds, sleep systems and night time postural support, cots and accessories.

Website: <https://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/>

Tel: 0300 999 0004

Independent Living

Information about equipment to help living with a disability – such as 'tough' furniture and sleep solutions.

Website:

<https://www.independentliving.co.uk/>

Fledglings

Charity that has products for children, including sleepwear, day and night-time wetting, equipment for bedtime like stayon duvets.

Website: <https://fledglings.org.uk>

ERIC

Charity that supports children with continence problems, their parents and professionals. Their helpline can help with potty training, bed wetting, daytime wetting, constipation and soiling. They also have a range of products to use at night to minimise the effort of changing bedding.

Tel (free, available Mon-Thurs 10am – 2pm): 0808 1699 949

Website: <https://www.eric.org.uk/>

Sensory Direct:

Set up by parents, Sensory Direct sells weighted blankets for children and teenagers, and other weighted and sensory products that help children with sensory processing issues.

Tel: 01905 670500

Website: <https://www.sensorydirect.com>

