

SLEEP ADVICE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND)

If you have a child with additional needs and sleep issues, bedtime can be tricky. Here is some advice that may help if your child struggles to drop off or stay asleep.

- Explore reasons for your child's sleep issues. Underlying reasons may include sensory processing difficulties, lack of understanding about night and day or medical issues.
- Record what is happening at night by using a sleep diary. Share this information with professionals to see if they can help you to explore why your child may have sleep issues and which might be appropriate strategies to try to improve your child's sleep.
- Use visual clues to support your child's understanding. Visual timetables can help to show your child what is going to happen next during the bedtime routine. This can make the evening calmer and easier for you and your child.
- Television viewing may hinder melatonin production so avoid any screens in the hour leading up to bedtime - this includes mobile phones and computer screens. Melatonin is the hormone that helps us to fall asleep and some research suggests that some children with SEND may not produce enough or may release it later in the evening. Replace TV with calm activities like completing a puzzle together or colouring.
- Review your child's diet to ensure that they are not eating or drinking anything sugar loaded before bedtime.
- Make sure your child is getting enough physical activity during the day and enough day light, particularly exposure to morning light.
- Slow down activities at the end of the day to help your child relax and prepare for sleep.
- Reduce talking and noise in the house or try calming music at bedtime. You can also consider a white noise machine if this is something your child likes.
- Adjust light levels in the room to help the release of melatonin. Use warm/yellow light rather than harsh white light. Blackout curtains reduce bright light coming into the bedroom in summertime. If your child is visually impaired or hearing impaired then sleeping in total darkness may be disorientating for them.
- Ensure that your child is in a routine and put them to bed at the same time each night. It is also important to wake them at the same time each morning.
- Having a warm bath or shower before bed leads to a drop in body temperature that can help your child feel more relax and get to sleep more easily.

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- Review your child's bedroom and assess whether it is a good environment to promote sleep. Put toys away or cover them up so your child is not visually distracted. Avoid strong cooking smells or perfumes near your child's sleeping area. Your child may have a favourite calming scent that they like to smell.
- Consider how their bed feels and whether it meets their sensory needs. Your child may have favourite pyjamas or prefer certain textures against their skin. Let them choose what type of bedding they have.
- Some children like to use a weighted blanket while they settle to sleep, however do not leave a child unsupervised with a weighted blanket, or allow them to use it whilst sleeping. A lycra sheet can be used on the mattress to provide touch pressure and a feeling of security.
- Use deep touch pressure such as firm hugs and/or massage to help calm your child's sensory system (link to hands on massage video).
- Sleep problems can be complex and it is important to try to identify possible causes, these can include anxiety issues, behavioural sleep issues as well as medical factors. Ask your health practitioners for guidance. Make sure that you tell them about any unusual night time behaviours such as snoring, teeth grinding or night terrors too.

Resources

- 'Hands on' technique for regulation video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuPZx7Xlxyw>
- Visual schedules video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09mk082S00g>
- Icons to make your own visual timetable
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/d9nu6c958iktrj0/AAA9_T8o64Jdq_RLLHauaiuGa?dl=0
- Visual timetable examples
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6wfuq5tlyilig/AACYg7KHfnUV4RRG37tK3VHVva?dl=0>

For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at thesleepcharity.org.uk or contact us on info@thesleepcharity.org.uk