

Information about sleep



Primary SEMH Outreach Service

How much sleep?

Everyone is an individual and therefore the following table should simply be used as a guide to how much sleep is needed:

Age	Average daytime nap	Average night-time sleep
3 months	5 hours	10 hours
12 months	2.5 hours	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours
3 years	1 hour	11 hours
6 years	None	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours
9 years	None	10 hours
10 years	None	9 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours
11 years	None	9 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours

It is important to recognise that these figures are just a guide and the amount of sleep that children and young people need can vary greatly.

Exercise and sleep

Exercise can be beneficial in helping children to sleep, but it's important to keep the following in mind:

- If your child exercises close to bedtime they may find it more difficult to fall asleep; children should be encouraged to exercise during the day.

What is affecting your child's sleep?

There are many reasons why your child may not be going to sleep or may be waking during the night. The following issues can all affect sleep. Take a look to see if any of these may be causing your child's sleep difficulties:

- Room temperature - Is your child too hot or too cold?
- Bedding - Is your child kicking the bedding off during the night and waking because they are cold? If so, you could consider using a double duvet tucked under the mattress of a single bed.
- Noise - Is there any noise inside or outside the home that may be disturbing your child? What may seem like a quiet sound to us can seem very loud to them.

- Light - Is the room dark enough? **Melatonin** is produced when the room is dark.
- An overstimulating bedroom - Does your child get out of bed to play with their toys? Are they playing computer games or watching TV before they go to bed? If so, your child may be overstimulated by their bedroom environment.
- Hunger - Could your child be hungry? What time are they having their meal? Does the last meal of the day need to be later? Giving your child a snack mid-afternoon can help to move their mealtime to a later time.

Diet and sleep

What we eat and drink during the day can affect how well we sleep at night. You might want to consider the following to try to make sure that your child's diet is not impacting on their sleep:

- Review your child's mealtimes - are they going to bed on a full stomach, which could make it difficult to get to sleep? Or could they be hungry?
- Limit the amount of caffeine that your child has, particularly in the evening. Remember that caffeine is also found in things like chocolate, not just in tea and coffee.

Drinking water in the evening helps your child to keep hydrated.

Limit sugary snacks before bedtime because they can give your child an energy fix. For example, try cutting out biscuits before bed and replace them with something like toast.

- Calcium-based food and drink have been proven to aid sleep. A drink of milk, a yogurt or a fromage frais are ideal choices in the evening.

Strategies to support sleep

Self-settling

Many children do not learn to settle themselves to sleep. This means that they rely on their parent carers to soothe them to sleep. If your child has not learnt to self-settle they will wake frequently during the night and need your help to get back to sleep. Each time your child comes to a **partial waking** they may wake up and then call out for you.

Other children develop a reliance on certain conditions to be able to settle themselves to sleep. A child may need the television to be on, for example, or a mobile to be playing. Each time they come to a point of partial waking they are likely to wake up fully if the television or mobile has been switched off.

Tips to help children self-settle

- If you stay with your child until they go to sleep you need to gradually work on leaving them to settle alone. The best way to do this is by moving a short distance away from the bed each night. For example, if you currently lie in bed with them until they sleep, you should try sitting next to the bed for several nights. Then you can gradually move your chair farther away from the bed each night until you reach the bedroom door and eventually leave the room.
- If your child wakes in the night you should repeat the routine that you carried out when they settled.
- Once you have turned the lights out and said good night do not engage in conversation with your child. Reduce the amount of eye contact you give to them. You may find it useful to use one single phrase during the night such as, "It is night time, go to sleep". If you start to have a conversation with your child they are being rewarded for remaining awake.

How to help your child have a good night's sleep

Bedtime routines

Routine is very important at bedtime. The same things need to happen in the same order every night for a bedtime routine to be successful. Here are some things to consider:

- Decide by what time you would like your child to be in bed. This will help you to structure the routine.
- Bath time should be a relaxing time and should ideally occur at least half an hour before your child goes to sleep so that their body temperature can regulate.
- Reading a story can be a nice way to round off bedtime. However, you should make sure that you have a clearly defined time limit on how long you are going to read.

- Story or lullaby CDs can be used, but you need to make sure you play them for the same length of time each night and turn them off before your child goes to sleep.
- Hugs and kisses are a lovely part of the routine, but make sure that you set clear boundaries about how long they last.
- A milky drink is a good idea. Remember to avoid any drinks containing caffeine, such as cola, chocolate, tea or coffee.
- Wake your child at the same time each morning, even at the weekend. This helps their bodies to get in a routine.
- Avoid screen activities, such as computer games, televisions and mobile phones, in the hour before bedtime because these can be highly stimulating.
- Hand-eye coordination activities help children to relax. Choose jigsaw puzzles or colouring in activities in the lead up to bedtime.
- Make sure that the room is at the right temperature and that your child is not hungry or thirsty.
- Use a set phrase to say goodnight, for example, "It's night time, go to sleep".

The table below shows an example of a good bedtime routine:

Time	Activity
5.30pm	Child has meal
6.00pm	Free play - computer games and television can be used at this time
7.00pm	Quiet play, including activities such as jigsaws and colouring. No computer games or television
7.20pm	Bath time
7.40pm	Child is ready for bed with teeth cleaned
7.45pm	Bedtime story
7.55pm	Cuddles from family members, who say goodnight
8.00pm	Leave child to settle

The above table is an example to help you develop your own bedtime routine for your child. Start off by deciding what time they should be in bed by.

Once you have devised your bedtime routine you should make sure that everybody involved in your child's care knows about it. Pin it up on your fridge and make sure that you stick to it.

How to establish a routine

You may well believe that a bedtime routine will not work for your child or that your child will not accept a routine. It is important to remember that you are in control of the routine. If you find that your child is delaying bedtime you need to reconsider the routine that you use. When establishing a routine you need to:

- choose a time when life is settled, holiday times are best avoided
- be prepared for your child to resist the routine and for their sleep to initially get worse
- carry out the new routine for at least two weeks, you will almost certainly find that their behaviour and sleep patterns begin to improve
- be realistic about what you can achieve, start off with small changes if this is more manageable
- stick to it and be consistent

"The best piece of advice I can give other parents is to set a strict bedtime routine and stick to it! No matter how hard it is you must stick to it. As soon as you give in a little you will have gone back to square one and all the hard work that you have just put in will have gone to waste. It is not easy at first, but as long as you don't back down it will begin to work." Parent

Consistency

When you have a bedtime routine you must be consistent. If you don't do the same thing each night it will not work. Other members of the family who care for your child should carefully follow the same routine.

If your child stays elsewhere, for example, with grandparents, a non-resident parent or at a respite setting, you should encourage whoever is responsible for the child to use the same routine. Explain to them the importance of consistency to help your child's sleep patterns and if necessary share this booklet with them.