

SLEEPING ISSUES

Sleep is a big issue for many parents of young children. It may be difficult to sleep well if a child is uncomfortable because of sensory issues, digestion problems or feeling worried. When there are difficulties with sleep, understanding the cause may lead to a solution for better quality sleep. You may find some ideas that help identify the difficulty and find ways to lessen the impact of this difficulty on sleep quality in this section.

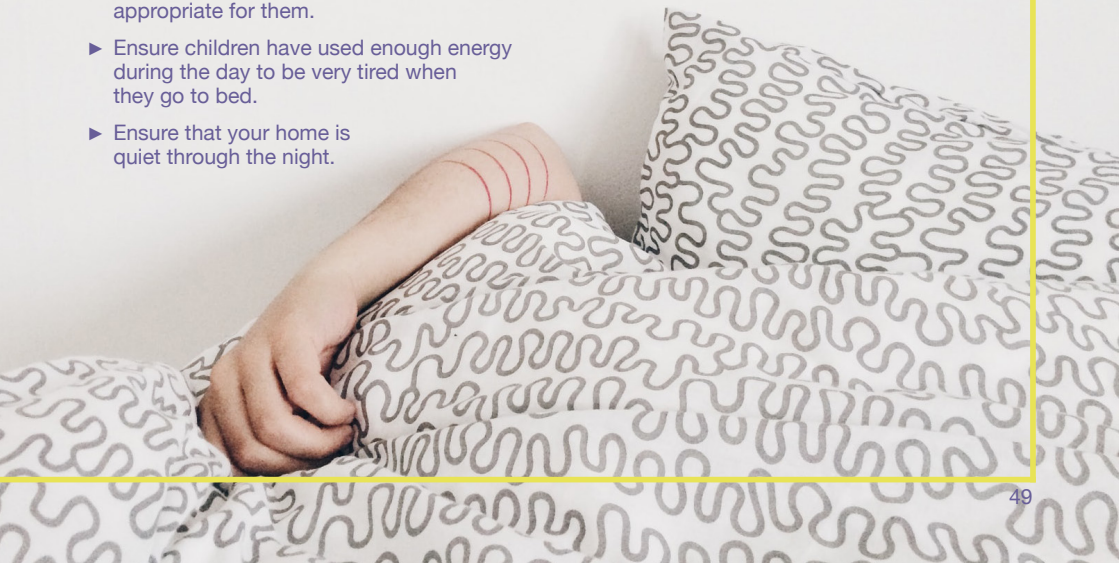
Sleep difficulties can include trouble falling asleep, frequent nighttime waking and needing less sleep. There are many reasons for this, and one or some may apply to your child or young person. Your child or young person may appear to be full of energy at bedtime, experience meltdowns at bedtime, or may try to avoid sleeping or bedtime altogether, even when you know that they are tired and need sleep.

HERE ARE THE MAIN REASONS:

- ▶ Anxiety is a common cause of poor sleep patterns. Anxiety about something that happened during the day, like an unexpected change to a familiar routine or worrying about something due to happen the following day, is common,
- ▶ They may not have enough natural Melatonin in their system for them to fall asleep (Melatonin is the hormone that helps you to fall asleep and regulates your sleep cycle)
- ▶ They may not have burnt off enough energy during the day.
- ▶ They may not have finished the task or activity they were doing.
- ▶ They may see bedtime as a demand (especially if PDA) and will do anything and everything to avoid it.
- ▶ Sensory needs – The room may be too bright, too dark, too warm, too cold, their pyjamas not comfortable, there is too much sound, not enough sound.
- ▶ They may have eaten food that has given them energy or caffeine too close to bedtime.
- ▶ They feel stressed – The stress hormone Cortisol wipes out the Melatonin hormone produced, making it more difficult to fall asleep.
- ▶ Separation anxiety, or fear of falling asleep on their own. Other family members are awake and active during the time a younger child is preparing for bed. An Autistic child may not recognise what is expected if other family members are not changing into pyjamas and going to bed.
- ▶ Children who frequently wake in the night may need to go to the bathroom, experience bad dreams, or enter too many light sleep cycles
- ▶ Some children do not need many hours of sleep. They will wake after a few hours of sleep and stay awake until the following evening.

Things that may help;

- ▶ Bedtime routine – Having a bedtime routine that is short and consistent in place helps children and young people know what will happen in the run-up to bedtime. A predictable and repetitive routine gives a sense of security and allows them to unwind and relax before bedtime.
- ▶ No access to video screens once the child is settling to sleep
- ▶ Keep things calm in the hour before bedtime so that they are as relaxed and calm as possible.
- ▶ Give a countdown to bedtime to have enough time to finish whatever task or activity they are doing.
- ▶ Ensuring that your child or young person doesn't eat anything before bedtime (over an hour beforehand) that could give them energy or make them feel uncomfortable or bloated.
- ▶ Understand their sensory needs and ensure they are met – Use background noise such as ocean sounds or white noise, blackout blinds to remove any light from windows, make sure that the fabric of their pyjamas or bed sheets is not itchy or uncomfortable, use a fan if they tend to feel too hot and uncomfortable in bed, etc.
- ▶ Aromatherapy oils in humidifiers can help, or a couple of drops of lavender, chamomile or frankincense in their bath (if having a bath is part of their bedtime routine)
- ▶ Ensure that the bedroom is not stimulating, not brightly coloured or have lots of things that your child or young person could be distracted by when trying to go to sleep.
- ▶ Some children will settle to sleep more easily and stay asleep when co-sleeping with a parent. This approach may reduce a child's anxiety and possibly satisfy a sensory need. However, children, who do not learn to fall asleep on their own, are likely to find it difficult to fall asleep without their parents if they wake in the night. Learning to fall asleep without a parent takes time and patience. Sleep training would be a helpful intervention when children have difficulty falling asleep without a parent.
- ▶ Allow a child to read or listen to soft music /white noise until they fall asleep rather than enforcing a "lights out" at bedtime rule.
- ▶ Stories to help a child understand the need for sleep
- ▶ If your child or young person is experiencing chronic sleep issues, speak to your GP or Paediatrician. They may consider if a prescription of Melatonin (a chemical version of the natural sleep hormone that helps you fall asleep) is appropriate for them.
- ▶ Ensure children have used enough energy during the day to be very tired when they go to bed.
- ▶ Ensure that your home is quiet through the night.



NIGHT TERRORS

Night terrors can occur for any child or young person. ND children might develop night terrors due to stress and anxiety, which heavily influences their dreams. Things that may help;

- ▶ In the lead up to your bedtime routine, keep things as calm and relaxed as possible.
- ▶ Try to alleviate any stress or anxiety beforehand to minimise these when they go to bed.
- ▶ One tip I have heard is to keep a sleep diary of when they wake up during the night then wake them up half an hour before they wake up, on average, in the night. This may help them to fall back to sleep faster and may even prevent the night terror.

USERS	RESOURCES	FREE ACCESS	WEBSITE LINK
Parents and Carers	CEREBRA. Sleep Advice Service	Free Access	www.cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service/
	Sleep For Better Day Ahead. Leaflet	Free Access	www.qvh.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Sleep-for-a-better-day-ahead-0127.pdf
	Sleep Hygiene in Children and Young People: Information for families. Leaflet	Free Access	www.media.gosh.nhs.uk/documents/Sleep_hygiene_F1851_FINAL_Jun20.pdf
	Encouraging Good Sleep Habits in Children with Learning Disabilities. Leaflet	Free Access	www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Good-sleep-habits-for-children-with-Learning-Difficulties.pdf
	Sleep Problems and Sleep Disorders in School Aged Children	Free Access	www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/sleep-problemsand-sleep-disorders-in-school-aged-children.html
	Further useful facts sheets and resources. Website	Free Access	www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets.html
	Other Websites: NHS Information Sleep Scotland Child Mind Institute Cheshire and Wirral CAMHS. Oxford Health NHS. Booklet for Children with Learning Disabilities.	Free Access	www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/sleepscotland.org/ www.childmind.org/article/encouraging-good-sleep-habits/ www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Good-sleep-habits-for-children-with-Learning-Difficulties.pdf
Adolescents	How to Sleep Well and Stay Healthy – A Guide For Teenagers. This is an interactive guide with animations, sounds and external links to useful educational video clips	Free Access	books.apple.com/gb/book/how-to-sleep-well-and-stay-healthy-a-guide-for-teenagers/id1397176909
	Sleep Tips for Teenagers	Free Access	www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/
	I See The Animals Sleeping: A Bedtime Story. An App	Free on Google play, App store and Kindle Store	www.school.sleepeducation.com/chil-drensapps.aspx
	The Animals Sleep: A Bedtime Book For Biomes. An App	Free on Google play, App store and Kindle Store	www.school.sleepeducation.com/chil-drensapps.aspx www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLQ3bkn8Gu8