

Sleeping Tips

It is important for everyone, big and little, to get an adequate amount of sleep in order to be able to be at their best. The following provides some strategies and information about how to promote healthy sleeping habits.

Using Relaxation Techniques:

Relaxation techniques can be introduced in low-key, non-intrusive ways in many areas of family life. Some possible techniques include:

- Adding a few drops of **lavender oil** to your child's bath; shown to have a soothing effect.
- Giving your child a **massage**. Direct skin contact can be uncomfortable for some children with sensory processing challenges so a firmer massage through the clothing may be the best option.
- Introducing an **hour of quiet time** before the child's bedtime could serve two purposes.
 - Doing a quiet activity could help them unwind and it also provides a valuable social cue. If everyone in the house is quiet and relaxed then the message the child receives is consistent, not mixed as it is if the house is still lively and noisy even though the child is expected to sleep.
 - It is even worth marking this quiet time on a daily timetable so the child knows what to expect and becomes familiar with this routine.
- Balancing **physical activity** (ideally outdoors) with quiet time is important. Physically exhausting your children is a good way of ensuring that they sleep!
- Some parents have found formal relaxation aids such as **music and exercises** (for example yoga) very useful. Some parents have reported having **lighting**; such as a lava lamp, in the bedroom can be helpful.



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- It may be worth providing the child with a set **time to talk about their day** or their worries as part of the evening routine. It may even help to have a 'worry book' or diary next to the bed so the child can write down or draw any concerns. They are then dealt with before bedtime. Alternatively, the child could have a worry box, so that worries can be written down and shut away in it.
- Make a slow change to **decaffeinated drinks**, replace ordinary chocolate with sugar-free chocolate bought in health food stores, use carob powder to replace cocoa and chocolate, switch to **sugar-free** drinks or replace sugar in drinks with sweetener or fruit sugar. This will also improve overall oral hygiene.



Establishing a Routine:

- All children, especially those with sensory processing difficulties, respond well to **routine and structure** because it allows them to feel safe and in control
- Things to consider include:

- Is it possible for you to eat dinner at the same time each night?
- Is it possible for your child to have a bath at the same time each night?
- Is there anything about your child's routine that can only be done in your home?
 - This could be something like playing on a particular climbing frame or having their own space for time out in the evenings.

- Essentially, an evening routine needs to be fairly simple, with scope for flexibility. This means that if you go away, or your child goes away, the basic routine can be preserved. You could try something like:



6:30pm → dinner
 7:00pm → quiet time
 7:15pm → drink and a piece of fruit/ low sugar snack
 7:45pm → bath
 8:25pm → clean teeth
 8:30pm → bedtime story or quietly looking at a book
 8:45 pm → sleep
 7:30am → waking up/getting up.

- Essentially, whatever routine you try to impose needs to be something you feel comfortable implementing and that your family can

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agree on. It may take several weeks for it to alter your child's sleep patterns.

- It can help to **present this routine visually**, using a timetable for instance, so your child knows exactly what to expect, including getting up in the morning. If the routine needs to be altered, it can then be explained visually. It may be that your child's timetable needs to be more detailed so that they are told exactly what to do when going to bed, for instance, draw the curtains, get in to bed, turn light off, lie down, pull cover up.
- It may also be worth setting aside some time to prepare for the next day in the routine. This could include getting the school bag ready or making a list/timetable of things that need to be done the next day.



Making Sleep More Comfortable:

- Some children are exceptionally **sensitive to light** so sleeping when there is even a very dim light on could be very difficult for them. Putting up thick curtains will block out as much light as possible in your child's room.
- Some children can be woken by very slight **sounds** at night. Having a thick carpet in the room and making sure the door shuts properly, moving bedroom furniture to provide sound proofing between rooms. A computer left on standby can be enough to disrupt sleep. Ear plugs or music playing on headphones could be used to block out noise for those children who are comfortable with wearing these. Some children need white noise in the background, such as a fan, to block out other sounds.
- **Touch sensitivity:** some children experience certain types of touch as physical pain. Some children are bothered by one leg touching the other so pyjama pants may be needed even in hot weather. Watch for scratchy labels on bed clothes. Tight pyjamas may provide a gentle pressure squeeze through the night which is very calming.
- It is also worth considering if **smells** in the room, or coming from other parts of the house, may affect people with heightened senses.



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- The **layout of the room** may also need to be adjusted. Keep the room uncluttered and toys away in bins or eliminate toys completely from the bedroom so the associations with the bedroom are for quiet times and sleeping. Even the colours of the room or pictures on the wall may be too much visual clutter.

Explaining sleep:

- Children can often have difficulty understanding the need for sleep. A social story (developed by Carol Gray) could be used to explain this. Visual supports, such as flow charts, could also be used to explain sleep; as can children's books that provide the biological explanation for sleep.
- Here is an example of a social story by Carol Gray (taken from My Social Stories book, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002):
 - What does it mean when people say, 'Time to go to bed'?
 - All people sleep. Most people sleep on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. They wake up each morning.