

# *Sleepy heads:*

**Information, advice and practical  
suggestions relating to sleep: a guide  
for parents & carers.**



## **Please note:**

Beam offers low-level interventions relating to emotional wellbeing in children and young people.

We do not diagnose.

This guide has been produced in response to the issues we hear about from young people and their families. This information is not intended to replace advice given by medical professionals.

Should you have any queries about this guide or about the Beam service, please contact

[AskBeam@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:AskBeam@childrenssociety.org.uk)

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# A regular theme for those we see within drop in is sleep: whether from young people, parents & carers or professionals!

At some point we have probably all struggled with sleep!

There is a wealth of information out there, so this guide has been put together using information sourced from various places.

We have aimed to make this as **practical** and **informative** as possible, and where appropriate have added links for you to get more information. Different strategies and ideas for dealing with common sleep issues are given throughout: don't panic if you read something that seems to contradict other things that you read within this booklet. **It is about finding the thing that works for you and your family** – unfortunately there isn't one 'cure all' solution, so a trial and error approach is needed!

We hope this guide will be useful not only for promoting good sleep for children and young people, but for all.

To introduce the subject of sleep, included below and on the next page is a copy of a blog written by one of our team for The Children's Society's website.

The full blog, along with others, can be found via <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/our-blog/how-to-get-better-sleep-top-tips-for-young-people>



# How to sleep better: top tips for young people

## The battle for balance

Sleep is a primary activity of the brain and is essential to healthy development in children and young people. It's nature's way of giving balance to the whole human system and improves function in every way. Sleep is absolutely vital to overall health and well-being.

But children and young people are not particularly good at recognising when they need to sleep and will usually push for a later bedtime if they can. We face a difficult battle in the current climate of smartphones, tablets and other electrical devices.

Once upon a time when we got home from school there was no real connection with the outside world or other peers but now connection to others is greater than ever, and therefore the peer pressure is ever more pressing. Young people can see when their peers are awake and compare bedtimes with others.

But it's really important that parents and carers regulate and enforce some pro-sleep boundaries into everyday life. As the old adage goes, 'you have to be cruel to be kind' to children and young people, as they will not regulate their own sleep/wake cycle as effectively if left to their own devices (no pun intended).



## Why sleep is important

In children aged 6 to 13 it's recommended by NHS England that they have 9-11 hours of sleep a night. Evidence suggests that if they don't have this amount of sleep then their mood, concentration and behaviours will be negatively affected.

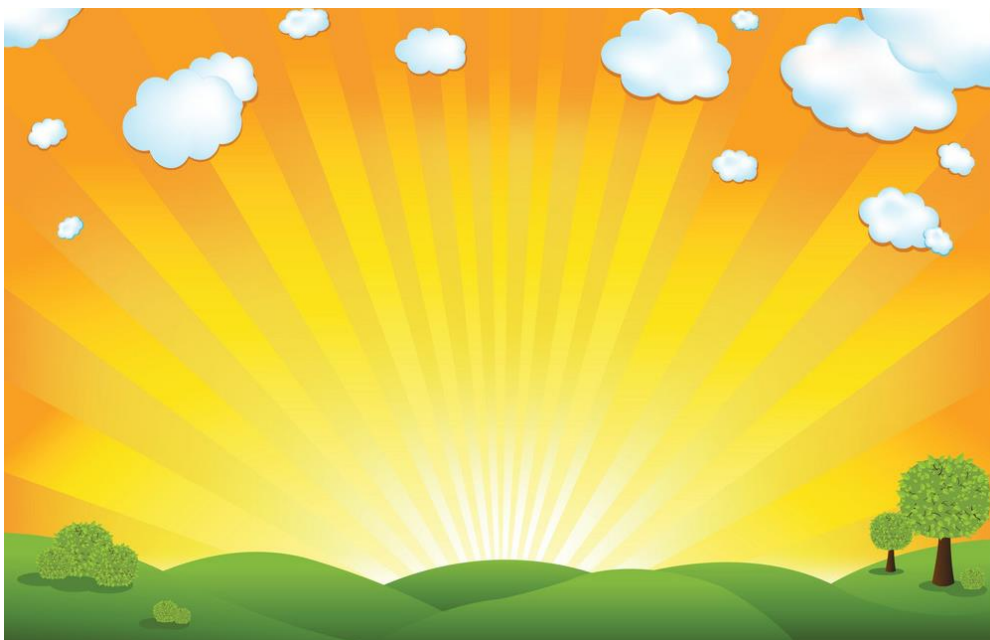
There can also be other adverse effects on the body in terms of temperature control, insulin production and cell maintenance.

School-aged children and students in particular should always aim for optimum sleep as, without this, the brain will struggle to maintain effective focus within a classroom setting. A lack of sleep can cause irritability and poor concentration which can make classroom learning difficult for everyone.

## Top tips for getting a better night's sleep

- Keep fixed morning routines, try not to allow too late a lie-in at weekends. We know that regular sleep/wake cycles help maintain structure
- Avoid napping in the day
- Exercise more in the day as this promotes cardiovascular health and creates dopamine in the brain which aid sleep later in the day
- Take warm baths at night
- Do gentle stretches before bed
- Read a book before sleeping
- Write a 'to do' list before bed
- Avoid smartphone use up to one hour before bed
- Make the bedroom a relaxing place to be - avoid having a TV in the bedroom or other devices which emit blue light
- Set the temperature to 18-24 degrees

**We will aim to expand on some of the pointers above throughout this guide!**



# We All Need Sleep!

Poor sleep can lead to physical health, mental health and functioning issues...

Read more: <https://www.alaskasleep.com/blog/how-well-do-you-sleep>

## Physical Health Issues

- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Irregular heartbeat
- Increased risk of stroke
- Diabetes
- Obesity & weight gain



## Mental Health Issues

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Forgetfulness
- Easily distracted
- Lack of motivation
- Symptoms of depression
- Chronic Stress

## Functioning Issues

- Tired in the day
- Low energy
- Poor decision making ability
- Low sex drive
- Less alert & slow reactions
- Easily distracted
- More errors & mistakes
- Memory problems
- Cognitive impairment



# Some Ways Sleep is Important for Kids...

<https://www.parents.com/health/healthy-happy-kids/the-7-reasons-your-kid-needs-sleep/>

## Sleep promotes GROWTH

“Growth hormone is primarily secreted during deep sleep. Both sleep and exercise induce the release of human growth hormone. Experts estimate that as much as 75 percent of human growth hormone is released during sleep.”



Read more: <https://www.tuck.com/sleep-hgh/>

## Sleep helps the HEART



When we sleep, our heart rate and blood pressure go down, meaning our hearts aren't working as hard.

- Studies show that people with sleep deprivation have a higher heart rate;
- Lack of sleep can lead to insulin resistance which is linked with type 2 diabetes and heart disease;
- Poor sleep can mess with our appetite which in turn can lead to unhealthy food choices which are bad for our hearts, and they can adversely affect weight too!

Read more: <https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/how-sleep-affects-your-heart#2>

## Helps the IMMUNE SYSTEM

When we sleep, we produce cytokines. These are used by the body to fight infection, illness and stress. Less sleep = lower cytokine production.

Interesting fact... These proteins also make us sleepy – which is why we need to sleep more when we are ill.



## Reduces INJURY risk

All of us are clumsier when we are tired. Kids even more so! Our reaction times are affected meaning we are more likely to trip or fall, resulting in injury.

## Increased ATTENTION

It's so much harder to stay focused on a task when we are tired or fatigued. Studies have shown that kids who don't sleep the recommended amount show increased impulsivity and hyperactivity which can look like ADHD.

Interesting fact... Did you know a goldfish has a longer attention span than an adult human?



## Boosts LEARNING

Our brains consolidate learning when we sleep, and our memories are stored... Lack of sleep can make us more forgetful. There are lots of studies which show that we can actually learn new things while we sleep!



# Healthy Habits & Hygiene

Sleep hygiene isn't about making sure we all clean our teeth or wash our faces before bed – it is about the bedtime routines and practises that happen before sleep. And these aren't limited to children: they apply to adults too.

Read more: 'Sleep hygiene' from [www.cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)

WATCH THIS!

## 'The 10 Commandments of Sleep'



*"Good sleep hygiene is about practising a variety of healthy lifestyle and sleep habits that can improve your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Small changes can have a huge impact on your sleep quality and quantity."*

Find the video at:  
<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-advice/sleep-hygiene/>

Read more about sleep hygiene:  
<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>

## Bedtime, hours of sleep & routines: everyone has an opinion!

As parents, we hear a lot about bedtime and sleep routines, and these start more or less from birth! With so much information and so many people having an opinion on what a 'good' bedtime routine looks like it can be confusing and frustrating trying to set one.

**Don't** get caught up in 'shoulds' and 'musts'... each child is different with different needs.

Guidance on the amount of sleep needed is a suggested amount. The likelihood is that your child will need somewhere near the number of hours suggested.

**Do** remember your role as parent/carer is to give routine, structure and promote healthy habits in your child – both at bedtime and for the rest of the day!

Try not to become stressed, anxious or worried about your child not meeting the suggested amount of sleep. The more stressed you are, the more likely it is that your child's sleep (and your own) will suffer as a result. Instead, try something new.

# Where to Start

## Routine

Having a regular routine is one of the most straightforward ways to train all of our bodies to sleep well: children, teens and adults. This means going to bed and getting up at the same time (or as close to it as possible) every day, even at weekends.

Now, we get that this is not something that will work for everyone – there have to be adjustments for those who work night shift patterns for example!

But where you can, lead by example.



## Realistic bedtimes

Adjust when you start your bedtime routine.

For example, if your child is unlikely to fall asleep until 11pm, starting any routine at 6.30pm is going to be stressful, not successful.

## Limit screen time

This is something you have no doubt heard before. But has anyone actually helped you to understand how this links to sleep?

Children and young people are more likely to delay sleep if they are caught up playing a game, watching TV or chatting to friends.

They are more likely to have their brains stimulated by this content too.

But there is something about the light being emitted by screens which can seriously affect our and our children's circadian rhythm (more about this further on!)



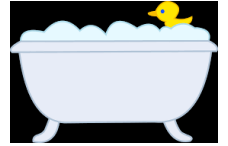
## Reduce the focus on sleep

Just like adults, kids can have trouble shutting their brains off for the night.

Instead of increasing that anxiety by insisting it is time to sleep, consider focusing more on the idea of relaxation and calming your child's body down.

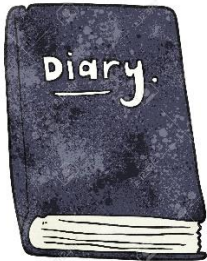
## Bathtime

Having a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can be useful, as it raises the body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again.



Research shows that sleepiness is associated with a drop in body temperature.

## Use a sleep diary



This can be a useful way of making sure you have the right facts about your sleep, rather than making assumptions. An example worksheet is included at the end!

Don't get too focused on clock-watching, and make sure child doesn't either as this can be counterproductive!

Try it for a couple of weeks, then you can try it again a few weeks later to see what progress has been made.

## Exercise

Regular exercise is a good idea to help with good sleep, but try not to do strenuous exercise in the 4 hours before bedtime.

Morning walks are a great way to start the day feeling refreshed! Where possible, you can walk with your child to school.



## Pay attention to food

A healthy, balanced diet will go a long way to improving overall health as well as sleep. It is important to get the time right though!

An empty stomach at bedtime would keep most of us awake so a light snack before bed can help.

Eating a big meal soon before bed can actually interrupt sleep.

More about foods for sleep further on.

## The right space

A comfortable bed and bedroom are essential for a good night of sleep.

It's also important to ensure the temperature isn't too warm – in fact a cooler (not cold) room is better!

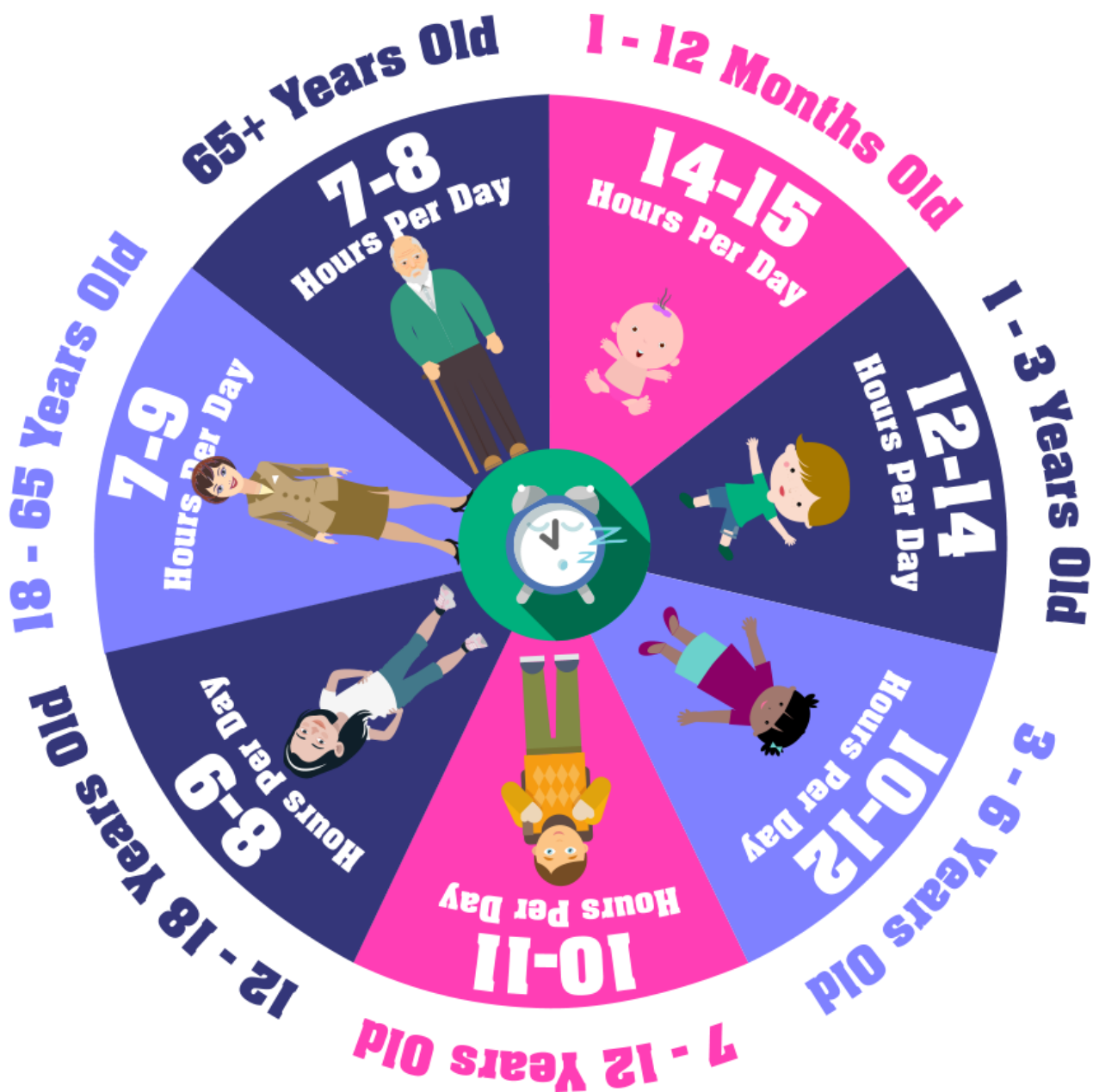


# How much sleep?

This chart comes from The Sleep Council as a guide to amount of sleep and ages. They also echo what we said earlier in this guide...

It's important to note that the hours are on the chart are a guide and it's more important to focus on sleep quality, not quantity, and establish a good bedtime routine and, just like adults, some children need more sleep, some need less.

Read more: <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/how-much-sleep-does-my-child-need/>



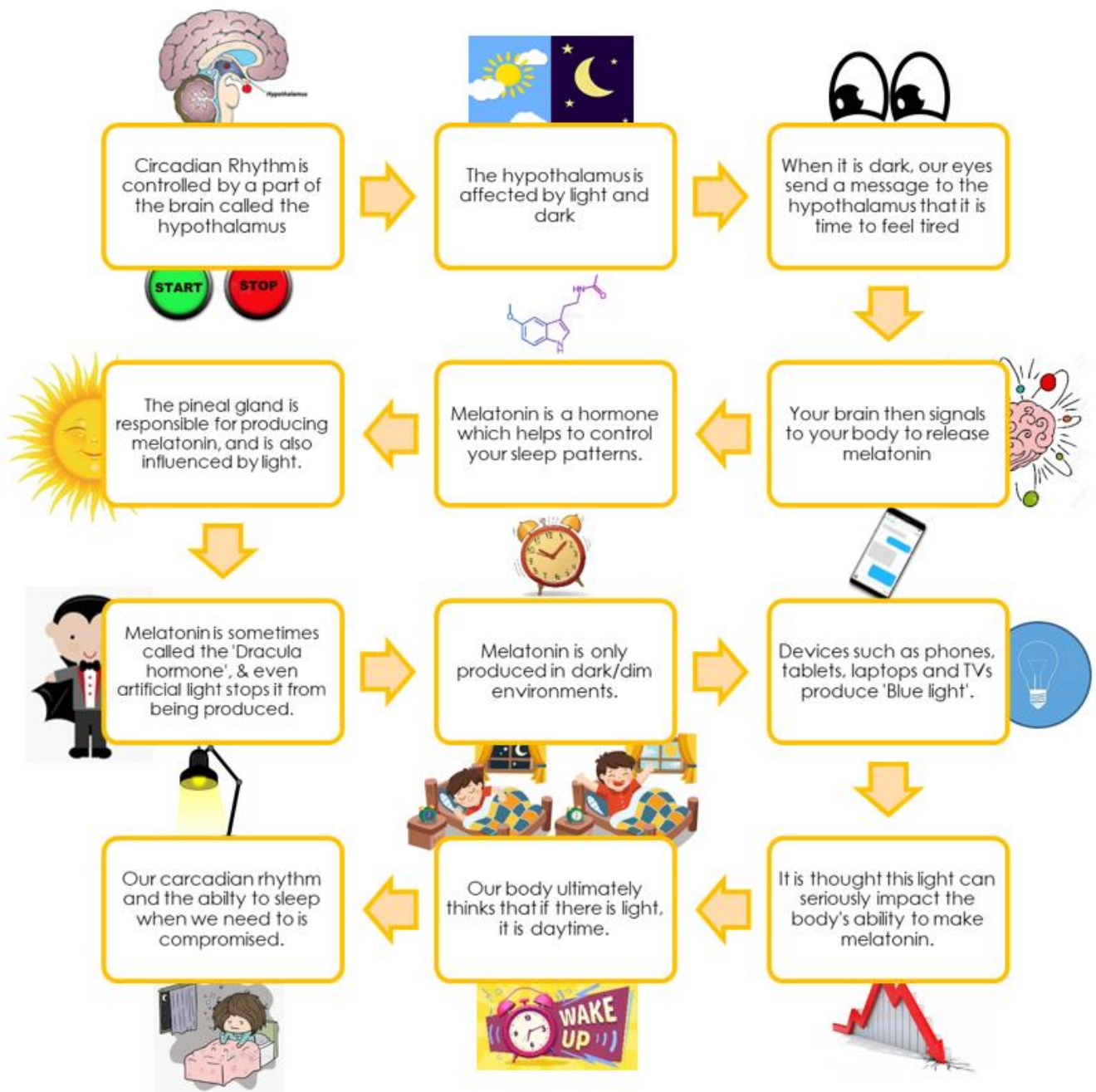
# Circadian Rhythm

## WHAT IS IT?

'Your circadian rhythm is basically a 24-hour internal clock that is running in the background of your brain and cycles between sleepiness and alertness at regular intervals. It's also known as your sleep/wake cycle.'

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/what-circadian-rhythm>

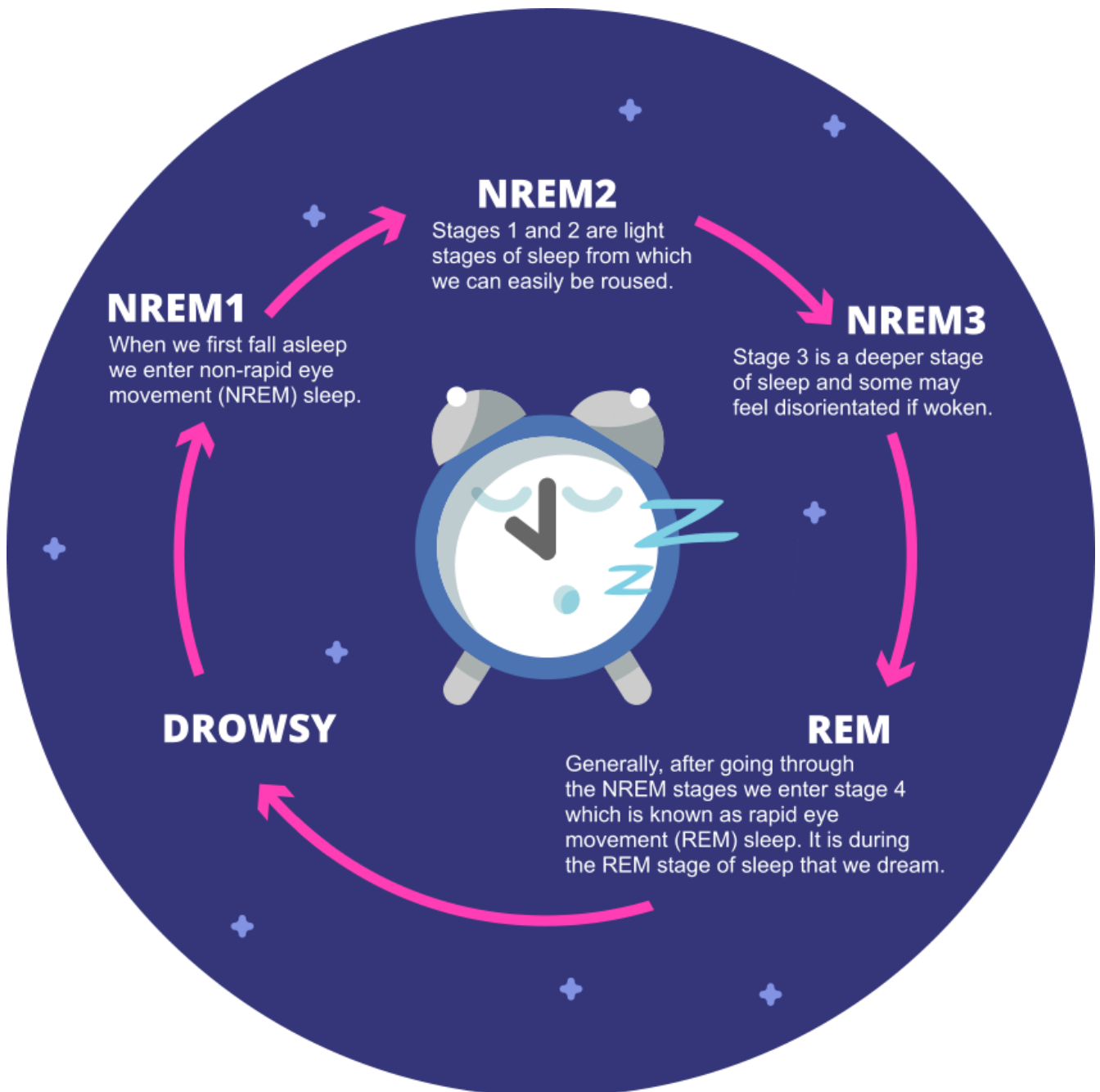
## HOW DOES IT ALL FIT TOGETHER?!





# Sleep: Types, Stages & Function

During sleep our bodies and our brains are inactive, right? NOPE! As you can see from the image below taken from The Sleep Council, we sleep in *cycles*, normally completing several of these each time we sleep.





# Non-REM (NREM) sleep has 3 stages:

## NREM STAGE 1:

Initial light sleep. During this stage:

- heartrate, breathing and eye movements slow
- muscles relax (but may twitch)
- brain waves slow down

This is the stage we are most likely to be disturbed

LIGHT SLEEP

## NREM STAGE 2:

period of light sleep before we enter a deeper sleep.

- further drops in heartrate and breathing
- more muscle relaxation
- body temperature drops
- eyes stop moving
- brain waves slow, but there are periods of increased activity.

Sleeping in a cool room helps this stage.

## NREM STAGE 3:

the deep-sleep stage. Longer periods of this stage happen in the first half of the night. This stage:

- heartbeat and breathing are at their lowest levels
- brain waves reduce further.

This is the **restoration stage**: tissue growth and cell repair takes place, energy is restored and hormones are released, like those for growth.

DEEP SLEEP

## REM SLEEP:

Usually happens about 90 minutes after falling asleep. Our eyes move from side to side while closed. Brain activity increases, breathing becomes faster and irregular and heartrate and blood pressure increase to almost daytime levels. Most of our dreaming takes place in this stage of sleep.

Read more:

<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/patient-caregiver-education/Understanding-sleep>

<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/sleep-matters/how-much-sleep-do-we-need/>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/sleep/understanding-sleep/about-sleep>

“sleep cycles get longer as children get older. In children aged 3, sleep cycles are about 60 minutes. By aged 5, sleep cycles have matured to the adult length of about 90 minutes. Children might wake briefly at the end of each sleep cycle & not be aware of it or remember in the morning. This is normal ... some children call out when they wake at the end of each sleep cycle”

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/sleep/understanding-sleep/about-sleep>

# Food & Sleep

We know that we need to eat healthy, balanced diets in order to keep our bodies and minds as well as possible, so the impact food can have on sleep will be no surprise!

As you would expect there are foods that are good for sleep and foods that aren't so good. We will go into this, and explain why certain foods may help with sleeping.

More information can be found via:

<https://www.alaskasleep.com/blog/foods-for-sleep-list-best-worst-foods-getting-sleep>

<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/sleep-matters/foods-that-help-you-sleep/>

## Sleepy Foods: From The Children's Sleep Charity

		Almonds contain magnesium which aids muscle relaxation
		Bananas are an excellent source of magnesium and potassium, which help to relax muscles. They also contain tryptophan which is important for sleep. <i>Blend one banana with one cup of milk or soy milk to make a bedtime smoothie.</i>
		Dairy products make great sleepy foods. Yoghurt, milk and cheese also contain tryptophan. Calcium is very soothing and can help to reduce feelings of stress, so it is true that a warm mug of milk can help you to sleep.
		Porridge is easy to prepare, inexpensive and keeps tummies full overnight. It's rich in calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, silicon and potassium. <b>Instead of topping with sugar which can give an energy rush, try a small amount of chopped fruit or honey.</b>
		Cherries have been found to naturally boost the body's supply of melatonin. Cherry juice can be found in most health stores but can be quite expensive.
		Cereal can be helpful as long as you <u>avoid sugar-loaded cereals</u> . Complex carbohydrates-rich foods increase the availability of tryptophan in the bloodstream.
		<b>Avoid anything</b> containing caffeine e.g. chocolate, coffee and tea.
		Sugar-filled foods are not helpful either, so biscuits, sweets, cakes should be limited in the run up to bedtime.
		Fizzy drinks and cordials can aggravate the bladder causing wetting during the night.

# Positive Bedtimes & Routines

Bedtime routines need to be calm and consist of things that will work for you, your child and your household.

## A bedtime routine needs to be positive

- ✓ **Remain calm.** If you aren't calm, it is unlikely your child will be either.
- ✓ **Give warnings** that bedtime is approaching. This can be verbally, or using other methods like timers, or sleepy music
- ✓ **Avoid** using your child's bedroom as a punishment: it is important that your child sees their bedroom as a calm and safe space
- ✓ **Give some choice** to your child about a calming activity (see tips section for calming bedtime activities).
- ✓ **Use positive language** and thank your child for being helpful.

<u>Instead of...</u>	<u>Try saying...</u>
'If you don't stop shouting I am not reading you a story!'	'When you stop shouting, then I will read you a bedtime story!'
'The TV is going off now whether you like it or not!'	'When this programme is finished, then the TV is going off'
'I'm sick of seeing you, get to bed!'	'It is bedtime now'
'You're having no more toys out until you tidy these up'	'When you have tidied these toys away, then you can have the others out'

## Use the 'When-Then' Rule

This is a strategy which promotes positive communication with children, rather than using language than trying to 'make them' do something. It is shown in the examples above.

- Start with a 'when' (the task you want your child to do) followed with a 'then' (the thing your child wants to do, but only once they have completed the 'when' task).
- Keep it simple: make your when-then statement, and then stop talking to allow your child to consider what you are asking them
- By saying 'when', the task are asking your child to do is communicated as being non-negotiable: do not say 'if'
- Stay calm, and don't shout.

More information:

<https://www.yummymummyclub.ca/blogs/andrea-nair-button-pushing/20140320/reduce-parenting-battles-with-the-when-then>

## Rewarding your child

- ✓ **Make sure your child knows** what you are rewarding
- ✓ **Verbally** give them praise, e.g. 'I like the way you are...'
- ✓ **Do not** give a reward and then take it away as a punishment
- ✓ **Do not** use sad faces or crosses if you are using a visual rewards system,
- ✓ **Give** the reward as soon as possible
- ✓ **Review** rewards regularly to ensure they continue to be an incentive for your child

Some of the above adapted from The Children's Sleep Charity 'Sleep Tight' Training

# Things to consider when developing a bedtime routine

Ideally a bedtime routine should take around 20-60 minutes, and ideally result in your child going to bed while they are still awake in order to reduce their reliance on you to fall asleep.

## Who will carry out the routine?

- Will you take it in turns if you have a partner?
- Does anyone else need to know about it? E.g. babysitters, grandparents, non-resident parent.

If other people put your child to bed it is essential that they follow the same routine.

## What should the routine include?

- Plan quiet time in the hour before your child goes to bed. Activities such as music, stories, massage etc.
- Hand-eye coordination activities help promote sleep. Activities such as jigsaws, threading & colouring in.
- Bath time should be carried out 30 minutes before you want your child to sleep. The fall in body temperature following a bath helps them to fall asleep.
- Does your child find bath time relaxing? If it is a trauma you may wish to bathe them in the morning.
- Would a transitional object help? Use a transitional (comfort) object such as a teddy bear or a blanket.

## Where should the routine be?

- Where will you put the routine in your house? It should be somewhere where it is accessible for all to see, e.g. fridge door

## When is bedtime/wake time

- What time do you want your child to be in bed for? Decide this first and then plan the routine from here.
- What time is acceptable to start the day? Anything before this agreed time should be treated as a night waking and not the start of the day.

## How will your child know what to expect?

- A visual timetable can help them understand the routine. There are lots of visual timetables available online, such as this one: <http://cwpcamhscentre.mymind.org.uk/mysleep-guide/>



My Bedtime Routine	
	Take a bath <input type="checkbox"/>
	Put on pj's <input type="checkbox"/>
	Brush teeth <input type="checkbox"/>
	Read a book <input type="checkbox"/>
	Go to bed <input type="checkbox"/>

www.newmormmasurvival.com



The most important thing is to be consistent in order to reinforce the routine. This will boost your child's circadian rhythm into knowing it is time to sleep.

Above Adapted in part from The Children's Sleep Charity 'Sleep Tight' programme.

Get more information about routines at The Children's Sleep Charity website:

<https://www.thechildrensleepcharity.org.uk/>

# Creating a Calm Bedroom

The original resource (as shown below) from The Children's Sleep Charity can be found on their website:

<https://www.thechildrensleepcharity.org.uk/>



**Tel: 01302 751416**

[www.thechildrensleepcharity.org.uk](http://www.thechildrensleepcharity.org.uk)

## How to Create a Calm Bedroom

Children benefit from having a calm bedroom environment in order to promote relaxation and get a good night's sleep.

It is important to spend some time planning your child's bedroom to make sure that it is relaxing rather than stimulating.

Some products on the market can actually over stimulate children or lead them to develop sleep associations that cannot be maintained throughout the night.



Here are some top tips to make sure that your child's bedroom is restful and helps to promote sleep:

- Decorate in neutral, calming colours, bright colours can be over stimulating.
- Never use the bedroom as a place where your child is sent as a sanction. The bedroom should be a place that is viewed positively.

Continued overleaf



- Watching television is very stimulating and can interfere with the body's production of the sleep hormone, melatonin. Make the bedroom a screen free zone, this includes computers and mobile phones.
- Make sure that toys are covered or stored away - they can be tempting for little ones to get out of bed and play with.
- Consider what is on display in your child's room. Could the posters be over stimulating or even scary in the darkness?
- Avoid props such as mobiles and light shows to help your child to sleep. Any conditions in place at the start of the night need to continue throughout the night.
- A dark bedroom environment can help to support a good night's sleep. Blackout blinds can be helpful, particularly during the summer months.
- If your child is afraid of the dark or has a visual/hearing impairment they may find a totally darkened room makes them feel anxious. If you use a nightlight then choose one with a soft glow that can be safely left on all night.
- Never have the bedroom too warm. Ideally the bedroom temperature should be around 16 to 18 degrees.
- If your child is noise sensitive, white noise can help to mask out background noise.



Tel: 01302 751416

[www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk](http://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk)

[info@thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk](mailto:info@thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk)

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on Facebook and Twitter





# Common problems and simple solutions

The use of the phrase 'simple solutions' shouldn't be misunderstood as 'quick fixes'.

Making changes where sleep is concerned is going to take time, patience and commitment. By accepting that this is the case, there are things that can be done (starting now!) that can make a huge difference over time.



## **BROKEN RECORD WARNING!**

You are going to read the words  
**'routine' & 'consistent'**  
over and over again.

*However, we know these things are key in helping children and young people with so many things, especially sleep!*



## **The aim: to promote your child to develop good, healthy sleep associations.**

Sleep associations are any action that helps your child fall asleep. We all have sleep associations whether we realise it or not.

Positive sleep associations are those which do not require input from anyone else – basically they don't require you to do something in order for your child to fall asleep. A negative association would, for example, be that your child needs you next to them until they fall asleep, or following waking in the night they can only fall back asleep next to you in your bed.

**The Sleep Health Foundation** state that most sleep-related issues in children are behavioural, and can be something that present early on in childhood or as a result of something changing – whether that be a holiday, a new home, being ill, family upsets, hospital stays or school related.



Visit their website: <https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/>

# Issue: Crying at Bedtime

*"It can be difficult to know whether your child is crying because they're distressed or simply want attention, especially if they cannot talk. You may find it very difficult to leave your child to cry, but if you go to them the moment the crying starts, they soon learn that this is a way of avoiding bedtime and gaining your presence and attention, and it becomes a regular occurrence."*

[https://contact.org.uk/media/389272/helping\\_your\\_child\\_sleep.pdf](https://contact.org.uk/media/389272/helping_your_child_sleep.pdf)

The following information has been taken from a guide produced by Contact, an organisation who support families with disabled children. We have detailed the link for their resource relating to sleep at the end of this section and in the further reading section of this guide.

Their website can be found at: <https://contact.org.uk/>

## TECHNIQUE 1: "The Extinction Method" (Leaving the child to cry)

### **IMPORTANT!**

Before outlining this technique, it is important to be aware of occasions whereby it may not be appropriate. In view of this, this approach should only be tried after discussion with a health visitor or other health professional, and full consideration given to the individual child's needs, for example medical conditions or other significant additional need.

This may be inappropriate to use if:

- Your child has limited communication skills. They may cry to indicate they are too hot/cold, thirsty/hungry, uncomfortable, unwell – all things that will prevent them sleeping if not responded to.
- Your child has sensory impairment or learning disability: they might be anxious about being alone, or simply not understand that it is night time and they are expected to go to sleep.
- Your child is likely to respond to this technique with self-injurious behaviour, so it is not safe to leave them.
- Another child's sleep would be severely disrupted because they share a bedroom.

## How it works...

- Parents are asked to leave the child to cry until the child eventually learns crying does not work.
- Initially, the child is likely to cry for some considerable length of time – possibly hours.
- This can be stressful for parents and carers so it is important to be able to continue through this

*"If you ignore the crying for say 30 minutes, but then find it impossible to bear any longer you effectively teach your child that persistent crying pays."*



## TECHNIQUE 2: Gradual retreat (reducing the need for your presence)

- If your child starts to cry, go in after 2-5 minutes (less if the crying upsets you) and gently but firmly resettle them with as little touching as possible and repeat your 'goodnight phrase'.
- Leave again.
- If the crying persists, go back at regular intervals of 2-5 minutes and go through the same resettling routine.
- You may have to go in many times to begin with but this will lessen each time until your child eventually falls asleep on their own.
- If your child comes out of the bedroom take them immediately back to bed without giving eye contact or talking and gently but firmly resettle them.
- Repeat their 'goodnight phrase' and leave again.
- If they come out again, just repeat this.

### What is a 'goodnight phrase'?

This can be something you add into your bedtime routine – for example "Goodnight, sleep tight, see you in the morning". Repeating the same phrase at bedtime will help your child understand it is time to settle down and go to sleep.

What if your child is used to having you in the room while they go to sleep?

Your child may get very distressed if they are used to having you in the room while they sleep, so it is best to give them the opportunity to adapt to you not being there.

- Initially, sit alongside them, but avoid getting into bed or cuddling them to sleep.
- Try to avoid eye contact and any conversation.
- Every few days gradually increase the distance between you and your child: sit by the bed, then a bit further away, stand in the door, then stand outside the door
- Does this until your child no longer needs you to be there for them to fall asleep.

"Whichever of these techniques you use, it is common for a child to start to improve and then for their sleep behaviour to get worse, before getting better again. It is important to be firm and stick to the routine, otherwise your child will continue to have bad habits, which may result in constant attention-seeking and postponement of bed times. Changing bedtime habits might take a while, but if you persevere it can have great benefits for everyone"

# Issue: Prolonged night-time awakenings

"Natural and largely unnoticed normal awakenings actually occur between four to six times a night in all children. These awakenings are not a problem when they are brief and your child is able to fall asleep on his or her own. It is only when these night-time awakenings result in your child crying or leaving his or her bed and venturing into your bedroom that they result in a problem."

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/14296-nighttime-awakenings>



Night time awakenings can be caused by things such as hunger , illness, night terrors, nightmares and fears, as well as at the end of each sleep cycle.

The key here is to boost the child's ability to self-soothe – i.e. to fall asleep without you having to intervene

## Try:

### Bedtime routines:

- ✓ Establish a consistent bedtime routine where you do the same things at the same time every night in the run up to bedtime.
- ✓ This should take 20-60 minutes and will help your child, over time, develop positive sleep associations which will encourage them to fall asleep.
- ✓ This should be a calm, happy and positive time.
- ✓ No screens!

### Wake up times:

- ✓ Consistent waking up times – every day of the week.
- ✓ For very young children (4 and under), any nap times should have consistent wake up times as well.

### Bedroom environment & security objects:

- ✓ If your child falls asleep with a nightlight, this should remain on throughout the night. Doing this will ensure they feel more secure should they wake.
- ✓ A soft toy or a blanket can be used to help them self-soothe without the need to have you intervene.

### Positive reinforcement:

- ✓ Set out a rewards system for them spending the whole night in bed. Use of sticker charts is a common approach, with an agreed treat once so many stickers have been received.
- ✓ However, don't be fooled into thinking that stickers will work with every child – you will need to work with your child to find out what they want to work towards in order to give them motivation.
- ✓ Be consistent in how you reward – don't be tempted to give in!

# Issue: Bedtime refusal and resistance

This could be active refusal to go to bed or verbal protests as well more subtle 'delay tactics'.

"I'm hungry"

"I'm thirsty!"

"I'm scared"



They might choose to tell you about their day, or, decide they want to discuss the meaning of life (like mine do-!)

## Try:

### Boundaries:

- ✓ Set them. Stick to them. Be consistent!
- ✓ Make it clear that this is the time for bed.
- ✓ A bedtime routine can include a small bedtime drink (avoiding caffeine and sugar for obvious reasons!), and a light snack. This will help mitigate the hungry/thirsty protests.

### As above:

- ✓ Establish a bedtime routine
- ✓ Use positive reinforcement techniques consistently.

### Don't be tempted to engage:

- ✓ This can be tough. We have busy lives, and often our other responsibilities (work, other family members) can leave us wanting to make the most of any time we can get with our kids.
- ✓ Remember: your child has had ample opportunity to talk to you about their day either before or during your bedtime routine.
- ✓ It can be easy to feel guilty about not engaging in this, but reassure your child that you are happy to listen to them any other time – just not bedtime!

### Creative collaboration:

"If your child is scared of monsters hiding under the bed or noises coming from the closet, sometimes creative solutions can help. A nightlight, stay-away monster spray, or playing games to help your child overcome fears may be helpful."

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/discipline-strategies-for-bedtime-behavior-problems-1094951>

Also, see section on fears and nightmares

## Could the issue be too much time in bed?

Just as exhausting as a child who won't sleep at night is a child who wakes up too early. This can be a sign that your child's sleep window needs to be adjusted! This can also show as bedtime resistance and other struggles.

## Try:

Delaying bedtime: this can be done incrementally (15 minutes) every few nights.



# Issue: Sleep-related anxiety

Chances are if you are reading this, there is an issue with your child and sleep. And if there is, it is likely that your child will know that this is having a negative impact on not only them, but others who live in your household.

The act of sleep itself may have heightened emotions associated with it, making successful sleep more difficult.

There also might be a genuine fear. We mentioned previously that a delay tactic might be that your child claims they are scared, but there are things you can do to help soothe any real fears your child might have about sleep, the dark and the dreaded monster under the bed.



## Try:

### Pinpointing the fear:

- ✓ If you can understand why your child feels scared, you can work with them to figure out how to overcome it.
- ✓ See 'creative collaboration' above!

### Look at the bedroom layout:

- ✓ Are there shadows that appear in certain parts of the room that they are fearful of?
- ✓ Is there somewhere in the room which is more dark than other places?
- ✓ Would a nightlight help?
- ✓ Perhaps move the bed to another part of the room.
- ✓ Sometimes even getting your child to sleep the opposite end of the bed can be enough!
- ✓ As we said before, if your child has a nightlight, assure them you will leave it on all night.
- ✓ Leave their door open.

### Reduce the focus on sleep:

- ✓ If sleep is an emotive issue in your household it is possible that this will heighten any anxiety your child has about achieving sleep.
- ✓ Factor a period of relaxation into your bedtime routine: make that the focus.
- ✓ Try a guided meditation (you can find clips on youtube)
- ✓ Use progressive muscle relaxation (ideas for this online)
- ✓ Be as easy-going and relaxed about sleep as you can. That way the less likely it is that sleep itself becomes the monster under the bed for your child.





# Issue: Fears and Nightmares

Nightmares are a common occurrence in children and young people – even for adults.

They can be a response to worries, changes, a new sibling, a new school, a trauma... the list is endless.



We can't prevent them.

But what we can do is help children (whether they are pre-schoolers or teenagers!) manage the associated feelings that come along with them.

## How can you help?

*"teaching your child that he or she can be the boss and not get tricked by their worry brain.*

*Teach your child the tricks that worry can play, like how it loves to exaggerate, catastrophize (make up extra scary stories for situations that are actually extra safe—like turning piles of laundry on the dresser into monsters, or household creaking sounds into intruders), and ignore the facts.*

*You can encourage your child to take charge, and enlist their imagination to be more honest with them.*

*How do they do that? By calling in their smart brain to test their fears instead of trusting them."*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/worry-wise/201503/helping-your-anxious-child-overcome-bedtime-fears>



# 10 Tips for Dealing with Bad Dreams

## Listen and understand



Try to understand the fears instead of dismissing them. Show empathy: Instead of 'why do you feel scared?' which might make them feel the need to justify their fears, try saying 'I know you're feeling scared'.

## Label it as a bad dream

Explain to your child it was a bad dream, it isn't real and they are safe.

## Encourage self-soothing

Use objects for this – a cuddly toy, a blanket... Anything that you have already identified as being soothing for your child where sleep is concerned.

## Set limits for reassurance

Don't ruin work already done! It is key to be mindful of not reinforcing their 'being scared' behaviour and encouraging bedtime resistance. This is why it is so important to work with your child to overcome their fears in relation to nightmares and the dark.

## Use nightlights



- ✓ If the room being pitch black isn't helping, use a nightlight. Nothing too bright that will disturb their sleep!
- ✓ If not a nightlight, leave the door open with the bathroom light on.
- ✓ Lava lamps can help too – your child may like to watch this while they fall asleep!

## Be creative



- ✓ If your child has a dream with a specific monster, get them to draw it and then make it look silly: add tutu's, silly glasses... whatever makes them giggle.
- ✓ Have 'monster spray' on hand – this can be a spray bottle filled with water and maybe a soothing fragrance (lavender for example).  
<https://www.andthenhome.com/diy-magic-monster-spray/>
- ✓ Use a 'dreamcatcher' above their bed and explain what this is for;
- ✓ Help them to imagine a different ending to their dream.  
Watch a short video about 'The Dream Completion Technique'  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swrNRAISZgM>

## Discuss fear in the day

Allow time to listen to your child's fears about their nightmares and their worries. During the day you can spend more time with your child on the next step: labelling and fact-checking their worries.

## Separate your child from the worry & fact check



Help your child view worry as a choice that they don't have to make:

"First, tell me what worry is saying to you. Then tell me what you think"

Label the worry and then ask questions such as:

- How true do you think that is?
- What do you really think is going to happen?
- Do you believe it,?
- Why or why not?
- If worry were taking a test at school would the teacher mark that answer right or wrong?
- What does your smart brain say about the dolls coming out of the closet?

The aim is to get them to see that just because the worry is there, it doesn't mean they have to believe it. They can choose to believe what other parts of their brain are saying.

## Teach coping skills

Let them know how you have dealt with something that you have been afraid of. Use coping role models from stories where characters have overcome fears.

## Make the dark fun

For younger ones, be creative in the dark outside of bedtime:

- Hold bedroom camping trips complete with torches.
- Have a treasure hunt in the dark, or hide glow in the dark items in their room and get them to find them;
- Get your child to be a 'tour guide' – either in their bedroom or another room: in the dark they can point out the light switches to you and show you how they work.

## Find out more...

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/worry-wise/201503/helping-your-anxious-child-overcome-bedtime-fears>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/sleep/nightmares-night-terrors-sleepwalking/nightmares>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/night-terrors/>

# Sleep & Autism

Research Autism suggest that 40-80% of people on the autistic spectrum have sleep problems. However, this doesn't mean that all autistic people do.

*"Most of the interventions (treatments, therapies and other forms of support) used to help people on the autism spectrum with sleep problems are the same as those designed to help anyone with sleep problems. For example, it can be difficult to get to sleep if you don't have a regular bedtime routine, if you are distracted by excessive light or noise, you use electronic devices like computers as part of your bedtime routine, if you have underlying health problems, or if you are constantly worried about something. It is important to identify and, if possible, eliminate these problems before considering other solutions"*

<http://www.researchautism.net/issues/1/sleep-and-autism/interventions>

## Reasons for sleep issues in ASD

- **Learnt behaviours** – not knowing when and how to fall asleep.
- **Missed social cues** – where an autistic person doesn't make the connection between others in the house going to bed and their own need to sleep.
- Adherence to **routines** and **repetitive behaviours**.
- **Sensory reasons**, such as finding certain noises disturbing or frightening. Also increased sensitivity to blue light from smart phones, laptops and other screens, or sensitivity to certain sounds or white noise, which may be upsetting or distracting and keep them awake.
- Use of **electronic devices**, such as computers, as part of the bedtime routine.
- **Night time waking**, or having difficulty getting back to sleep after waking up to go to the toilet.
- **Difficulty settling**, winding down and going to sleep due to "active mind" with "racing thoughts" and the inability to unwind and let thoughts go.
- **Increased anxiety** an inability to relax causing insomnia
- **Neurological conditions** such as epilepsy
- **Coexisting developmental conditions**, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- **Abnormal circadian rhythm** (body clock) or Irregular secretion of the sleep hormone melatonin,
- **Side effects** of medications, such as stimulants.
- **Medical problems**, such as reflux and constipation.
- **Dietary problems** caused by food allergies, which could cause gastrointestinal issues and discomfort, or increased sensitivity to caffeine or other stimulants, which can disturb sleep.
- **Hypersomnia** - sleeping too much. Increased exhaustion could be caused by the additional stress autistic people experience in social situations.

**Read more:** <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/sleep.aspx>  
<http://www.researchautism.net/issues/1/sleep-and-autism/referencesused>

## National Autistic Society (NAS) make the following suggestions:

- ✓ **Use a Sleep Diary** to help identify unusual patterns and identify what factors may be impacting your child's sleep, as well as to monitor the impact any new strategies or techniques;
- ✓ **Establish a reassuring bedtime routine** using visual prompts and following the advice given throughout this booklet.
- ✓ **Make the bedroom comfortable** for your child and any sensory needs they may have. In addition to the suggestions made in the earlier section, consider the following:
  - ✓ **Block out light** using dark curtains or black-out blinds.
  - ✓ **Reduce noise** using thick carpet, shutting doors fully, turning off appliances, and moving your child's bed away from a wall with activity going on on the other side.
  - ✓ **Block out noises** by letting the person use ear plugs or listen to music through headphones.
  - ✓ **Remove labels** from bedding and night clothes, or try bedding and nightclothes made from other materials.
  - ✓ **Reduce smells** coming into the room by closing the door fully, or by using scented oils that the person finds relaxing.
  - ✓ **Remove distractions**, such as toys on the bed and pictures on the wall (unless the person finds these relaxing), and consider a different colour on the walls.
  - ✓ **Use relaxation techniques** such as having a bath, massage, quiet time or gentle exercise such as yoga, to help the person wind down before bedtime.
  - ✓ **Use Social Stories** to explain sleep. NAS have information about these here; <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>
  - ✓ **Consider if there are dietary issues** which are causing discomfort

Reference to medication & natural remedies have not been included as they are beyond the scope of this guide.

Read more: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/sleep.aspx>





# Sleep & ADHD

The following is taken from 'Sleep Seekers' a resource produced by ADDISS which can be found here: <http://www.addiss.co.uk/sleepseekersbooklet.pdf>

*"The relationship between sleep and ADHD is complex and can be a vicious circle: ADHD can lead to sleep problems and a lack of sleep can make the symptoms of ADHD worse. Furthermore, certain medications for ADHD can lead to further sleep difficulties."*

The very nature of ADHD can mean that calming bedtime routines are difficult. Finding the right methods and techniques for your family and young person will be key. However, rest assured that many of the techniques and ideas given throughout this guide can still be used.



## Suggestions:

- ✓ **Exercise** can improve sleep, but strenuous exercise should be avoided a few hours before bedtime
- ✓ Establish a **consistent bedtime routine** – same bedtime and wake time each day of the week
- ✓ **Avoid screens** before bed, removing these from the room if needed
- ✓ Using a **sleep diary** can be helpful in helping you identify what issues there may be: knowing exactly where the problem lies means you can start to consider possible solutions. This may help you to notice patterns in your child that leads to bedtime being both easier as well as more difficult. An example Sleep Diary is given further on
- ✓ Already covered in this guide is that **food and drink** can have a huge impact on sleep. Refer back to this section. This is where a sleep diary can be helpful as you may notice patterns in what your child has eaten and bedtime difficulties. Avoid your child having a heavy meal too close to bedtime
- ✓ **Adjust the bedroom** environment – moving or hiding toys, making changes to lighting or noise levels & checking the temperature is comfortable
- ✓ Give **clear verbal instructions** to your child
- ✓ Be **positive** in your interactions – praise, encourage and reward the behaviour you want to see more of

Medication is beyond the scope of this guide and should be discussed with a relevant medical professional if you feel this is impacting on your child's ability to sleep.



# Teen Sleep

*"It's very common for children in the early teen years to start wanting to go to bed later at night and get up later in the morning. This is because they start to secrete melatonin later at night than they did in earlier childhood, which affects their circadian rhythms. Also, as their brains mature during puberty, children can stay awake for longer."*

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/healthy-lifestyle/sleep/sleep-teens>



It is easy to attribute late nights and lie-ins to teenage rebellion, or even another way of trying to fit in with peers. However, this isn't necessarily the case. Research suggests that hormones influence teenage sleep patterns, meaning their circadian rhythm (body clock) is altered (see previous section on this!). This leads to a physiological desire to stay awake later at night and longer in the morning.

*"It turns out that adolescents have a delayed release of regular daily melatonin, which causes them to become sleepy later at night, hours after nightfall."*

<https://www.neurologytimes.com/blog/teenage-circadian-rhythm>

Teenagers still need the same amount of sleep, but the shift in their body clock wreaks havoc on their ability to follow conventional sleep-wake patterns.

Research indicates that teenagers can achieve the required amount of sleep they need, albeit at an altered time. The altered timings then become an issue when they need to get up early for school the next day and haven't been able to get the amount of sleep they need, resulting in increased feelings of fatigue.

Ironically, being overtired can make sleep more difficult. A vicious cycle!

*Parents and carers... it is important to highlight that a change in sleep behaviour such as going to bed later than you would like isn't necessarily a sleep problem – it's a biological one!*

**There are ways you can help, such as...**

...*explaining* how their circadian rhythm works & what affects it (use the earlier section on this!)









...*talking* to them about sleep hygiene

...*modelling* healthy sleep habits yourself






...*listening* to them about their difficulties – whether that is with sleep or something else.



## What can help?

-  Keep fixed morning routines, try not to allow too late a lie-in at weekends. We know that regular sleep/wake cycles help maintain structure
-  Exercise more in the day as this promotes cardiovascular health and creates dopamine in the brain which aid sleep later in the day
-  Take warm baths at night
-  Do gentle stretches before bed
-  Read a book before sleeping
-  Write a 'to do' list before bed
-  Avoid smartphone use up to one hour before bed
-  Make the bedroom a relaxing place to be - avoid having a TV in the bedroom or other devices which emit blue light

## What doesn't help?

-  It's easy to turn to energy drinks and sugary snacks in order to fend off fatigue, but this can make it harder to sleep or increase the likelihood of restless sleep
-  External stress and pressures such as exams and deadlines
-  Day time napping
-  Screen time just before or while in bed
-  Bedroom temperature being too hot or cold

## More information about teens & sleep can be found...

<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/family-matters/teenagers-sleep/>

<https://www.neurologytimes.com/blog/teenage-circadian-rhythm>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/sleep-problems/>

<https://www.themix.org.uk/your-body/sleeping>



# Sleep Diary



		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>BEDTIME ROUTINE:</b>	What time did this start?							
	What did this include?							
<b>FOOD/DRINK BEFORE BED:</b>	What?							
	When?							
<b>TIMES:</b>	First put to bed							
	Time fell asleep							
<b>DISTURBANCES:</b>	Number of times awake/out of bed							
	Your actions							
	Triggers for disturbance							
<b>NEXT DAY:</b>	Time woke in morning							
	Rate tiredness (5 being very tired)	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
<b>Any other comments</b>								

## Some further sleep information (by no means an exhaustive list!)

<b>Sleep information from Cheshire &amp; Wirral Partnership NHS Trust CAMHS</b>	<a href="http://cwpcamhscentre.mymind.org.uk/mysleep-guide/">http://cwpcamhscentre.mymind.org.uk/mysleep-guide/</a>
<b>'Helping your disabled child sleep' – Scope</b>	<a href="https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/help-disabled-child-sleep/">https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/help-disabled-child-sleep/</a>
<b>Sleep health foundation Website</b>	<a href="https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/">https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/</a>
<b>'How to cope with Sleep problems' – Mind</b>	<a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/about-sleep-and-mental-health/">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/about-sleep-and-mental-health/</a>
<b>Sleep Scotland</b>	<a href="https://www.sleepscotland.org/">https://www.sleepscotland.org/</a>
<b>The Children's Sleep Charity</b>	<a href="https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/">https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/</a>
<b>Centre for Clinical Interventions – information sheets about sleep</b>	<a href="https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Sleep">https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Sleep</a>
<b>Behavioural Sleep Problems in Children (journal article)</b>	<a href="https://www.uptodate.com/contents/behavioral-sleep-problems-in-children">https://www.uptodate.com/contents/behavioral-sleep-problems-in-children</a>
<b>'Helping your child sleep' – Contact</b>	<a href="https://contact.org.uk/media/389272/helping_your_child_sleep.pdf">https://contact.org.uk/media/389272/helping_your_child_sleep.pdf</a>



## **Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Beam Ludlow Beam**

During lockdown, Beam are providing phone-based support by way of a call-back service.

To access support, email:

[AskBeam@childrensociety.org.uk](mailto:AskBeam@childrensociety.org.uk).

Emotional Wellbeing support for under-25's.  
Support for parents/carers in conjunction with a young person.

Young people over 14 years can request support for themselves.

Young people aged 13 and under will need a parent or carer to request on their behalf.

