

Supporting Sleep – Five steps

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Studies have shown that between 50-85% of those with a neurodevelopmental condition have sleep difficulties.



It is vital that we get the right amount of sleep to support both physical and mental wellbeing. If a child sleeps well, they are more likely to:

Be mentally alert

Feel happier

Learn more effectively.

Be able to concentrate

Experience less anxiety

Better focus and outcomes of tasks

1. Daytime Routine

Believe it or not, how we spend our day can hugely impact how well we sleep. Spending time outdoors exposes us to sunlight which is important for setting our body clock as it helps create melatonin. Exercise can contribute to restful sleep, improving sleep quality and increases time spent in restorative sleep. It also helps get rid of tension and stress and burns up excess energy. A healthy diet promotes healthy sleep. The neurotransmitter serotonin helps regulate sleep, 95% of which is made in our gut. Avoiding napping or dozing during the day will help with falling asleep at night.



2. Bedtime Routine

Plan your routine to include things your child / young person finds calming. An example of a bedtime routine may include:

- Turn off electronic devices one hour before bed
- Engage in an activity to help calm, e.g. reading, drawing/colouring
- Evening drink and snack (Avoid caffeine & sugar)
- Bath / wash, teeth, toilet
- Get into bed (listen to music, story)
- Turn the lights off

3. Sleep Environment

A carefully considered sleep environment can help our child / young person fall asleep and stay asleep:

- Temperature – the optimum temp is around 18 degrees
- Keep the bedroom dark by drawing curtains / blinds and keep lighting low.
- Make sure that the environment is somewhere that they associate with sleep.
- Toys should be put away to avoid distraction. Electronic devices such as TVs, games consoles etc should be avoided in the bedroom.
- Consider sensory needs: texture of bedding / sleep clothes / temperature / noise



4. Positive Sleep Associations

We experience brief awakenings at the end of each natural sleep cycle. If your child / young person cannot get back to sleep they will search for the positive associations they have made at bedtime. A sleep association may include things like a teddy, a specific blanket, calming music etc. Where possible, encourage your child to be independent with their sleep associations, so they do not need assistance from you.

5. Moving bedtime backwards (also known as phase advancement)

This is used when children are not falling to sleep until much later than their actual bedtime. For example, if your child is put to bed at 8pm, and doesn't sleep until 11pm, you would start by putting them to bed at 11pm (with a calm down routine before). Gradually make this time earlier by 15 minutes each day, until you get to a more reasonable time. This technique can help to move sleep patterns to the desired time, can increase the average sleep time at night and decrease any sleep disturbances. Our body clock takes its cue from light; using bright light in the morning can help advance our body clock ready for waking up.