

SLEEP



BUSTING!



STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS WHO BATTLE AT BEDTIME!

- 1.** This booklet is in three parts. The first part gives you the basic facts about sleep, what happens during sleep and why it is so important for children's wellbeing and growth.
- 2.** The second part outlines the foundations of a good sleep routine for when your child has a mild or moderate sleep difficulty and you just need to adjust things a little at home.
- 3.** The third part explains the more stubborn difficulties associated with Mental Health, emotional wellbeing, or neurological conditions. It will assume the foundations have been laid and more parental action is needed.



1. Why sleep is so



We sleep approximately 56 hours a week, 224 hours a month and 2,920 hours year. **One third** of our lives is spent, what looks like doing *nothing*!

- From the outside, our sleeping bodies look still, but we are really ‘on standby’ to give our tired bodies’ time to rest. On the inside, our brains are actually *very* busy, repairing and sorting out what has happened to us over the day. Like ‘rebooting’ us fresh for tomorrow!
- If you do not sleep, it follows that your brain cannot ‘reboot’, repair, or think clearly. Sleep deprivation is *still* a form of torture; new mums with babies feeding at night and ‘Jet lag’ show us that we find it difficult to function if our sleep pattern changes. It can also affect growth, weight and even how long you live!
- During the first COVID lockdown, many families found getting their children back into a sleep routine for school very difficult. When every day seemed like a weekend, it was easy for bedtimes to slip and you may have found that it took a good month to get your child back into a bedtime routine. For some children, bedtimes have always been tricky and since Covid, they have been out of sync ever since.



Here is some information and common tips for getting children in a sleep routine:



Q: So how much sleep do you need?

Newborn to 2 months old	12 - 18 hrs
3 months to 1 year old	14 - 15 hrs
1 to 3 years old	12 - 14 hrs
3 to 5 years old	11 - 13 hrs
5 to 12 years old	10 - 11 hrs
12 to 18 years old	8.5 - 10 hrs
Adults (18+)	7.5 - 9 hrs

We know that sleep can vary from person to person. If your child has no difficulty, waking and getting up in the mornings and is in a good mood and full of energy *all day*, he or she is probably getting enough sleep. Then the difficulty you may be experiencing is how your child’s sleep affects your own!



Sleep cycles (Or Circadian rhythms):

Whilst we are asleep, we are actually completing 90-minute sleep cycles, which involve both light and deep sleep states and REM dream sleep. At the end of a cycle, we resurface and sleep lightly; some of us notice that this is the time we tend to wake up at night for the loo!

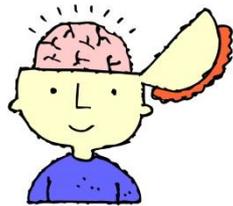


The first hour of sleep can be quite light for some people; they may twitch or keep waking. *Perhaps you notice that your child finds it difficult to get off to sleep during this time.*



During the first 4 hours, we move between different sleep levels and REM dream sleep (possibly the source of nightmares) before drifting into our deepest sleep. We repeat our sleep cycles a couple of times more during the night. Each time, resurfacing after a deep period of sleep.

If you have a new baby, you will know that being awoken unexpectedly during a deep sleep can be unpleasant; it makes you wake feeling groggy and grumpy. It is always better to be woken *naturally*, or during a light sleep stage. Your brain usually sorts this out for you, by waking you just before the alarm goes off and it will cleverly adjust your sleep cycle to wake you during a light sleep stage, *if you get into a regular sleep pattern*. In summary, going to bed a bit earlier and being in a sleep routine can make you wake up naturally, **in a better mood**.



Melatonin

Melatonin is a chemical our bodies produce to make us sleepy. Scientists have copied this chemical and put it into tablet form, enabling poor sleepers to **temporarily** sleep better. It is not a long-term solution.

From cave men to the Victorian era, going to bed and going to sleep was the most natural thing in the world. There was little lighting until the 20th century, so the brain would have found the production of melatonin easier, no bright electric lights, TV's, gadgets and fuss at bedtimes over switching it all off.



Today, we love technology and depend upon gadgets and lights to solve all our difficulties. However, Lights from a TV or even a lamp will simply wake the brain up, interrupting the production of melatonin. 

Over 24 hours, your brain carefully monitors how long you have been awake, how much exercise you have done, how physically and mentally tired you are and changes in the seasons and light. Towards the darkening of the day, about 4 hours before bed, your brain tells your body to produce the chemical, **Melatonin**, to make you sleepy. Most people then fall asleep, after about 4 -6 hours.

The trouble is, the brain likes to be in routine and produces melatonin at the same time every day. It can cope with a couple of late nights, able to go back to its calculated bedtime, but generally, it does not like to change its routine or *have to change it back!*

We notice this with jetlag and it is thought that putting the clocks back can even affect the number of car crashes in the autumn. 

 This is why it is sometimes hard to train your child back to early nights after a holiday. They may be grumpy, sleep in the day, and tell you that they are not tired. We suggest going to bed 15 minutes earlier every night, if your child finds adjusting back to bed times difficult.

You can see why Doctors do not like to prescribe Sleep medication when the brain is trying hard to sort out its own melatonin. It is always advised that parents should try a sleep programme *before* going to their GP. In the long term, using tablets will simply confuse the body, as well as the natural production of melatonin. Children who take sleep medication usually have to come off seep tables in the holidays, because it simply stops working after a while.



2. The foundations for getting children into a sleep routine

Here are some basics to have in place before you start a sleep programme, change or start a child's bedtime routine for the first time. 

For mild sleep difficulties with an easy-going child, a 'family chat' in the daytime about sleep arrangements will let your child know that **will** be changes at bedtime. If your child is easily upset, or hates any change, it will be useful to have a proper talk, to explain and prepare him in more detail. There may need to be a reward system put in place, so that there is 'something in it for him'.

- **Daylight** has a big influence over our sleep and we need to be outside for a minimum of 30 minutes a day, during daylight hours, allowing the brain to check out the natural light.
- **Daily Exercise:** Ideally, an hour's walk daily to make sure your child is **physically tired** for bed. *Mental tiredness* from stress or gadgets may keep your child awake. If he has done nothing but sit down on Xbox all day, it will make it more difficult to get that body to sleep. Exercise tires the body out and helps the brain calculate how much sleep we need.
- **No drinks** for 2 hours prior to bed time and ensure your child has gone to the loo before getting in to bed.
- **No stimulants in the day:** e.g. Caffeine, cola, or energy drinks. Sweets too near bedtime also stimulate us.
- **No big meals** or snacks before bed, a yoghurt or light snack is OK about an hour before bed.
- **No gadgets 2 hours before bed.** We have already talked about how our love of gadgets does not make us physically tired. In addition, the iPad will NOT return your child to sleep if he wakes in the night. It is more likely that he will wake up wanting the reward of his iPad.
- Similarly, getting children to sleep with the TV on is teaching him that he *could not possibly go to sleep without it.*
- **Bedrooms need Very low lighting,** preferably proper darkness, some night-lights are too distracting and bright and will 'wake up' the brain. *Even if your child wakes in the night, resist putting the light on, as this will wake up his brain!*
- **The temperature of a bedroom should be cool,** e.g. 18 degrees or lower
- **Calmness in the family home,** no shouting, or arguing before bed. Stress stops children [and adults] from sleeping
- **Reading** a book at bedtime is *great* for all primary aged children. It is reassuring, give 'closeness time' with a parent before the long separation of night time.
If this is not possible, a 'Talking book' (*check Amazon 'Audible' for 'Wind in the Willows' or 'Just William' books that last over 120 mins*).
- **Relax kids CD are relaxation programmes** (easily found on Amazon). You could also find meditation/sleep music off UTube to get your child off to sleep. You will need to lay near-by and actually do this with your child for the first few times, to ensure he is doing it correctly.
- **Lavender oil** can help your child slow their breathing down if you do use the sleep CD's

Common difficulties and Troubleshooting:



All the above strategies will help with the following difficulties:

Fear of the dark: At some point in childhood, most children experience a fear of the dark, or going to bed at night. Young children and children who have learning or trauma issues have difficulty separating what is **real** from what is **imaginary**; so while the idea of monsters under the bed may seem silly to you, it can seem very real and very frightening to your child.

What you can do: Try not to complicate matters by using 'fairy dust' to get rid of monsters, or waving a magic wand to scare away any ghosts, you're better off explaining to your child that their imagination is fantastic for play, but at night it can trick them into mistaking normal things, such as shadows, for something frightening. *Do not be tempted to put them in your bed. It will be difficult to get them back out.* Stay nearby until they are asleep.

Nightmares usually occur *before* midnight, during the first sleep cycle. They can be triggered by the common 'fear of the dark'. During a Nightmare, a child can wake up upset and sometimes remember the bad dream the next day. These tend to fade with time; occasionally it can cause some anxiety before bedtime.

What you can do: it is important to talk nightmares through *in the daytime*. It will be important to understand what is happening for them and any common root causes, for example: any 'change', a new baby, friendships/bullying, parental difficulties, illness, or bereavement. Children often need their fears 'Decoding' and 'shrinking down to size' in the daytime, so reassure your child that Nightmares are *not real* and cannot happen in the day. You may need to repeat this mantra a great deal *rather than dwelling on the content of the dream* too much, as this increases their fear. Be practical and focus on gently getting them settled back to sleep.

'Night terrors' usually occur after the first sleep cycle, after 12.00. It happens more to boys and they usually grow out of them by their teens. During a Night terror children do not tend to wake up and can settle back to sleep. Commonly, children shout, sweat, cry out and it can be upsetting to witness, but they usually do not remember *anything* about this the next day.

What you can do: There is no need for a child to be woken from a Night terror and doing so may startle him more; usually keeping the light off and gently reassuring your child will be enough to help him return back to sleep. There is no 'cure' for Night terrors, but if they happen at exactly the same time, you can try to wake your child 10 minutes beforehand, to interrupt the 'habit'. If night terrors include sleepwalking, ensure doors are locked, get a safety gate at the top of the stairs, and remove anything breakable.

Children with sensory sensitivities can struggle to *get to sleep* for a number of reasons: feeling too hot, too cold, too uncomfortable and wriggling in the bed. They can be very easily distracted by noises, sounds, unable to settle his body.

What you can do: This usually happens in the first hour or so, as the child's body is still sensitised and the mind focused on feeling uncomfortable. These children often like to sleep in their parents beds for comfort [a big NO] It will be important to know *what your child is sensitive to* in order to get night time routine right. An OT can help with this. The meditation or Relax kids CD's are also a good way of desensitising the body for sleep and taking the mind off any sensory discomfort. Some parents find that heavy duvets or 'weighted blankets' [usually made with bamboo] help these children.

Life style choices and Modern distractions: It is universally known that gadgets keep us awake, no matter what age. The 'one eyed babysitter' has freed up a lot of adult time, especially over lockdown, but 'Blue light' from iPhones, laptops, chrome books etc. all give off flashing lights you do not notice, keeping the brain awake and delaying sleep. After a while, the poor brain gives up trying to get the body to sleep and may start producing melatonin later and later, disrupting its carefully laid plans . If late bed times become a habit, then it is hard to get your brain to change back to a 'normal' bedtime. You and your child may start to *believe 'I cannot get to sleep; I might as well stay on my XBOX'*.

What you can do: We recommend coming off gadgets at least 2 hours before bed to do something without a screen. Please see 'first' section. This may mean switching off the wifi.

Adult material: There are many opportunities for the under 10's to see films with scary, or adult content. After all, kids can get round our settings and know more about tech than we do sometimes. Please watch out for any sexualised language or behaviour, '*fear of clowns*' or references to scary film characters.

Even some 'family films' can be too stimulating. Some of these films are exciting and entertaining, especially if all the family are watching; but some sensitive kids who are not mature, or who may have learning problems, do not fully understand the story lines, or understand what is '*acting*'. After all, films *look very real*.

What you can do: Check for sexual content in films and note what older siblings are watching. It is too easy for younger children to accidentally view adult material. A child *visually learns*, so **seeing** is *believing* and seeing horrible things is very hard for children to process and forget. It is not difficult to see how the brain may wish to process these scary films through Nightmares, or show fear and separation anxiety at bedtime. Again, talk to your child in *the day* about their fears, not in bed, where it all happens. You may need to do this for a while, as you child may take time to process a fear.

Trauma: children always notice family stress and domestic arguments. Most adults say that children were ‘in bed’ during arguments, but children say they could ‘hear it’, or felt the tension and felt unsafe. Previous experiences of any Trauma, loss or worry can make children feel unsafe at bedtime which is, after all, the longest separation *from you* in the 24-hour day. Clinginess at bed times and even during the daytime is a common fear response, depending on how sensitive your child is. From a child’s point of view, home needs to feel safe.

What you can do: Similar to advice for ‘Nightmares’, difficult losses and experiences need to be talked out in the daytime.

Adult problems need to be kept (as much as is possible) *out of the family home*. Adults are not at their best during difficult times and often regret what they say and do when all is well a year later. Separations are hard for parents, but children go through separations and divorces too. We would also advise any parent who is being hurt or harmed by their partner to leave with your children immediately, children can be traumatised by domestic abuse and they always know it is happening or when ‘something is wrong’.

Separation anxiety and worry: Anxiety is a very common wellbeing or mental health condition that can run in families. Anxious children, who are usually also over sensitive can experience bedtime as a *separation* from their parents, causing them stress and keeping them awake. It is common for *all* separations from a parent whether to the shops, school, or grandmas to be difficult.

Start by understanding their fears. Acknowledge them, tell them ‘lots of children have these fears’ before reassuring them that their worry is ‘not real’ and nothing bad is going to happen. Short separations, building up to longer ones may work. Better than remaining your child’s prisoner, or distressing them with overnights elsewhere. At the school gate it is usual to leave an anxious child with the teacher and they are all OK *once you have gone*.

Get them a special security toy or blanket for nighttime. Having a pet in the room with them can also help to lessen their fears, as long as it does not disrupt their sleep.

Explore their bedtime fears during the day, so they are prepared for night. Have them check under the bed to see that there is nothing under there, for example.

Encourage your child to stay in bed, even if they wake up in the night. You want your child to learn that their bed is a safe place, so it is better to sit with them while they go back to sleep rather than remove them from their bedroom. Again, **do not** be tempted to let your child sleep in your bed, as a short-term solution. This is actually a long-term *problem* when it takes a *long time* to get them back out, especially if they find separations in the day difficult.

Children with a neurological condition: such as ASD sometimes appear to need little sleep. At the same time, they like things on their terms and do not like to come off gadgets for bedtime. This can become a battle of wills. It can also be hard when they are playing with other kids who are allowed to stay up late.

What you can do: Getting your child into a sleep routine under the age of 10 will be easier now than later, when they are bigger, stronger and more techno savvy. You will need to be very factual, with rewards and sanctions such as switching off the Wifi, which may not go down well even for the adults. Even with Melatonin, they will still need to be in a bedtime routine. It is advisable to contact your local CAMHS team about sleep difficulties for children with ADHD or ASD. They in turn will advise a sleep programme before any meds are given.

Much of the above can be assessed yourself by completing this questionnaire:

Here are some common sleep habits, daily life activities, and sleep environments. Please circle a number to show how often the situations fit your child's sleep behaviours:.

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1. Bedtime is not at the same time every day	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. He/she gets up at different times every morning and is often late leaving the house	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. S/he Stays in bed long after waking up in the morning and struggles to wake up	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. S/he Sleeps in on weekends	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. S/he Naps or sleeps during the day for over an hour	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. S/he does not want to go outdoors during the day and avoids doing so	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. H/she does not do regular exercise	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. At home there is stress and arguments during the day	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. At home, there is not enough time to down time prior to sleep.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. My child worries and talks about worry when lying in bed	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. s/he wakes or check the time in the middle of the night	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. S/he does other non-sleep activities in bed and before sleep (watching TV, Ipad, playing Xbox)	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. S/he Worries about not being able to fall asleep in bed	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. S/he worries about night-time and has night fears during the day	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. S/he likes to do Vigorous exercise during the 2 hours prior to sleep	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. S/he drinks caffeinated/fizzy drinks (Coke, tea, sodas) within 4 hours prior to bedtime	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. S/he goes to bed complaining of being hungry	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. S/he drinks a lot during the hour prior to sleep	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. S/he eats too much food during the hour prior to sleep	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. The household or bedroom is either too noisy or too quiet or shares a room	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. The bedroom is either too bright or too dark	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. The bedroom is either too humid or too dry	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. S/he complains of being too hot or too cold during sleep	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Does your child still sleep with you	1	2	3	4	5	6

25. S/he complains of
uncomfortable re: bedding
and/or pillow

1

2

3

4

5

6

Max = 150 score. The questions show you what needs to change if you score highly. Scores of mostly 4, 5, 6's are worth you thinking about changes to the sleep routine, or talking to someone about how to do this.

Sleep programmes for sleep fighters:



If you feel that you have tried all the above, the next stage is a sleep programme.

Parents tend to use sleep programmes when their child refuses to sleep in their own bed and is disturbing adult sleep or when their child fights sleep. The only reason sleep programmes do not tend to work is that the children can 'out wake' the adults and the adults give in. In addition, parents often find that they are competing against the Xbox, when gadgets seem to have more power over their child than they do. But be reassured, the younger the child the easier it should be do, as **it will never be a good time to start a sleep programme.**

Sleep programmes only work if both parents and your child are 'on board'. Children do not *have* to agree, but they do need to know what will happen and that you are *not going to give in*. They will also need a tangible reward for this awful change to the way they prefer to live their life.

Preparation:

- Make sure all the tips in the first section are covered, so a routine is established.
- It is better to start a sleep programme during the school holidays or a Friday night, as it gives tired parents doing the sleep programme a rest the next day.
- **The message:** Remove all TV's and gadgets from the bedroom, as well as any distracting toys. The child now needs to know that a bed is only for sleeping in and bedroom is not for TV. This can be reversed once the routine is established
- **Hold a family meeting with all present.** You will need to explain the importance of sleep; no one else [other siblings] need to leave their beds if the 'sleep fighter' is complaining, or upset. There will be need to be a reward for the 'sleep fighter' [better if all his siblings also get a reward if they are all going to suffer, also siblings can be supportive if there is 'something in it' for them too].

- **Write up** the bedtime routine for all to see, use pictures if possible.
- Your child needs to know that you will put them back into bed every time they leave it and all gadgets and wifi will *be switched off*.
- Make, find and display a star chart for the sleep fighter to see. Tick off progress every day. Praise and rewards are VERY important.
- Parents will need to prepare themselves for no sleep and have a book, phone and a flask ready. A handy friend or grandparent will need to be on hand the next day should *you* need rest.

The First night:

- Take your child to bed 45 minutes before hand and settle them using all the tips in section 1. Preferably a story or 'Relax kids' CD.
- If you can, go to bed and return your child back to bed every time he leaves his bed. If your child is resistant, you will need to be outside his door. For children with Separation anxiety, you may need to break this down even more, by sitting in the room but moving further towards the door each night, until you are out of the room over *several* nights (see *The disappearing chair routine*' below)

Night 2-6

- Your child should be much more tired for the next few nights, try to call in favours from grandparents and friends and continue with their daily exercise, activities whilst you get some sleep in the day, ready for the night ahead.
- You will need to hold out until **s**he accepts he will not win and goes to sleep.
- A positive advantage to succeeding with a sleep programme is that your child's general behaviour can now be easily tackled, as he is less grumpy and you have back in control' over something important. Bedtimes.

RESOURCES:

- RELAX KIDS CD: you can buy these from Amazon, the 'Anxiety and worry' is a useful CD. You can ring school and speak to Rebecca if you want to discuss this further
- Audible AP: you can play 'Talking books' on your phone. For £7 you can replay the same story every night.
- BBC Sounds AP: CBBC has put a 'white noise' sound recording to get kids to sleep. Worth a look at.
- 'Google 'The disappearing chair routine' The Solihull approach sleep programme
- Lavender oil

- Please ring me or Suzanne at Walworth School for more support, encouragement, and information on sleep programmes.

Name:	Monday night	Tuesday night	Wednesday night	Thursday night	Friday night	Saturday night	Sunday night	Reward
								
								
								
								
								
								

