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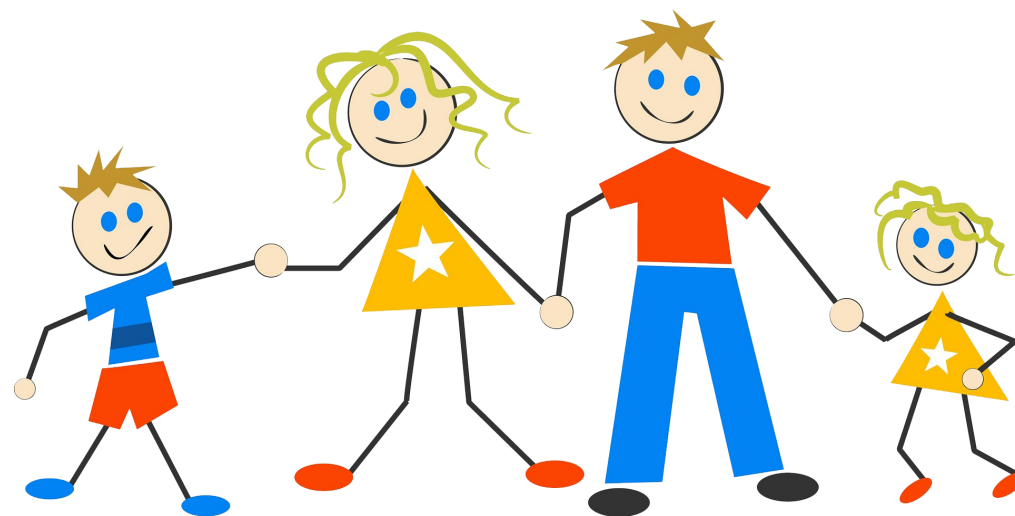
If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: [ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net).

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.

# Sleep Difficulties

## Community Paediatrics



Sleep difficulties are very common in young children and even more so in children whose development is unusual.

### How can I help my child sleep better?

Unfortunately there is no quick and easy way to fix sleep issues, but with routine, consistency and patience, things can improve.

### Where do I start?

#### Find the right time to start

Sleep training is often hard work and can be exhausting - but then so is not sleeping so it's definitely worth a try. Try to find a time to start at a time that is right for you. Can you get some back up (partner, other family members)? Would it work better for you to try this during school holidays? If your child is in pain or unwell, sleep training is more difficult.

#### Set the Scene

First try to make your child's room as suitable for sleep as possible. Consider black out blinds if the room isn't dark enough. Consider having a small nightlight if your child is afraid of the dark. Avoid having a TV in your child's room: it's much harder to control their TV use if it's in their room. Have their soft toy/blanket or anything else they want to cuddle in bed, near by.

#### Design a positive, consistent Routine

A predictable home environment and routine helps children feel safe and secure. This is often even more important for children with developmental difficulties.

Plan your bedtime routine in advance and make sure that everyone involved in childcare is aware of/ and understands the importance of sticking to the plan. If your child has difficulties with language or understanding, consider using pictures to support bedtime (some are attached to this leaflet).

#### What makes a good routine?

Successful sleep routines need to be **regular**- a part of everyday life, and **predictable** – things happening in the same order every time. Prepare for bedtime by turning off any electronic devices (TVs, smartphones, tablets etc) at least **one hour before bedtime**. Many sleep routines involve some 'quiet' play, bath-time, clean teeth, toilet, sharing a book, then cuddles and lights out. Using a consistent 'bedtime phrase' to signal the bedtime routine is over and it is time for sleep is helpful. 'night night, I love you', or 'I love you, time for sleep now' is often used, but make sure you do it every night!

#### How do I choose a routine that works for us?

Each child is different and you know your child best. If there are some activities your child does not enjoy, for example, bath-time, consider moving these to a different part of the day.



Here are a few ideas for pictures which may help you communicate a bedtime routine:



### **My child likes to watch TV before bed – is this OK?**

Studies have shown that the light produced by electronic devices tricks our brains into thinking it is earlier in the day than it is, and stops us releasing an important hormone, called melatonin. Our bodies need melatonin to feel sleepy so it is important to avoid electronic devices around bedtime if at all possible.

Hopefully by now you have a plan in place and everyone is on board. So it's time to start putting it into action.

### **Be positive**

Try to start every day in a positive light and try to let go of any difficulties that took place last night. This can be tough, especially when you are likely to be very tired yourself but negative comments and behaviours towards your child will not help them or you.

### **Keep going**

it may take quite some time for things to consistently improve and unfortunately sometimes things actually get worse before they start getting better. This is normal so try to stay focused on your consistent routine even if this is happening.

Look for and praise your child (and yourself!) for any improvements no matter how small!

Children's Community  
**Health HUB**

Your one stop  
contact point

## FAQs/Troubleshooting

### **My child won't let me leave the room after I've said my bedtime phrase.**

Children who are used to you being with them when they settle off to sleep are likely to become distressed if you try to leave while they are awake. This is even more true for young children/children with developmental difficulties who may not understand why things are changing.

### **Take things at your child's pace**

There are a number of different methods that people use to try to help their children to settle themselves to sleep. Some parents have found 'camping out' is a useful method.

- Place a chair/mattress next to your child's bed.
- Gently (and quietly) stroke or pat them until they fall asleep, and then leave the room
- Once your child starts falling asleep like this (hopefully after a few days), gradually reduce the amount you pat/stroke them. Every few days try to reduce this more until hopefully your child will be able to fall asleep without patting/stroking.
- Once your child is able to fall asleep without being touched, gradually (again every three days or so) move your chair/mattress slightly further away towards the door.
- If your child wakes in the night, try to settle them using the approach that you have been using at bedtime.
- Try to be quiet and avoid eye contact when it's time for your child to sleep or they won't settle. Otherwise, they may think it's a signal for play-time!

Unfortunately, there is no magic solution. . Sometimes it may take weeks or even months before your child is able to settle themselves to sleep. Try not to feel bad about it. All children are different and there are other methods out there to try (helpful websites can be found at the end of this leaflet).

### **Why is it important for children to learn to settle themselves to sleep?**

It is really important for children to learn to fall asleep by themselves, as the way they settle at night is the way they will go back to sleep on waking. If a child needs to be rocked to sleep at bedtime, they will also need you to be rocked to get back to sleep in the middle of the night.

### **Useful websites**

- [www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk](http://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk)
- [www.Babysleep.com](http://www.Babysleep.com)
- [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- [www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk](http://www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk)
- [www.researchautism.net/publicfiles/pdf/good\\_sleep\\_habits.pdf](http://www.researchautism.net/publicfiles/pdf/good_sleep_habits.pdf)

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