

PRACTICAL SLEEP TIPS FOR CHILDREN

Everybody can benefit from having a good sleep routine – even grown-ups! A good sleep routine needs to be planned well in advance. Consistency and firmness are also key.

Firstly you need to consider what time bedtime will be and then work backwards, planning the hour leading up to it in some detail. If your child isn't settling until late you may need to gradually move their bedtime as previously described, the routine will need to be gradually moved too.

- Make sure bedtime is realistic, if your child isn't falling asleep until 11pm there is no point starting a routine at 6pm.
- Create a calm, sleep-friendly bedroom. It needs to promote relaxation so decorate in calming colours, remove gadgets from the room (including the TV) and put toys away. Keep the room dark to block out external light and never have it too warm, 16-18 degrees is ideal.
- Don't send children to their bedroom/bed if they've been challenging. Their bedrooms should be a safe haven and not one where they feel anxious, stressed or worried.
- Dim the lights in the hour before bedtime, close the curtains if needs be and create some darkness to help to promote melatonin (sleep hormone) production.
- Turn all screens off in the hour before bedtime to help calm your child and to support the production of melatonin (the sleep hormone).
- Offer quiet activities that are motivating to your child. Fine motor skill activities are perfect to aid relaxation eg jigsaws, colouring in, threading, building with bricks etc.
- Consider introducing supper time. Slow releasing carbohydrates are great for keeping little tummies full. Dairy products are also very calming at night time. Avoid anything sugar loaded or containing caffeine.
- Baths are great if your child finds them relaxing. If however they are fearful of them or get overexcited they may not help in the bedtime routine. Ideally a bath should take place 30 minutes before bedtime as this aids relaxation by increasing the body temperature. It is the slow decrease in body temperature that helps us to feel more relaxed and nod off more easily.
- Get ready for bed in the same order – for example, pyjamas on, tooth brushing, toilet etc.
- Once in bed spend some time reading a bedtime story with your child.
- Give hugs and kisses and tell your child 'it's night time, go to sleep'.
- Wake them up at the same time each morning to help to strengthen their body clock.

For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at thesleepcharity.org.uk or contact us on info@thesleepcharity.org.uk