

Sleep

For children, sufficient sleep is necessary to allow the body to rest from high levels of daily physical activity and to promote healthy growth of bones, muscles and other body tissues. Further, the human brain is often more active during wakefulness, performing functions that are necessary for providing mental alertness the next day; if these functions are interrupted, problems with memory concentration, and mood may result.

Bedtime routine

A good bedtime routine can be the key to a good night's sleep. Babies and children are more relaxed if they know what is coming next, so establishing a routine will help them to relax and fall asleep easily.

Stick to your routine as much as you can, even when you are not at home. It can help a child to settle in unfamiliar surroundings. It does not matter what you do, so long as you try to keep it the same every night.

Getting to sleep:

- Younger children may like to listen to quiet music or a story tape.
- Keep room dim (try blackout lining at windows/use a dimmer light switch).
- Check room is suitable temperature and child's bedding/clothing suitable for temperature of the room.
- Last playtime – a wind down time about 10-15 minutes of quieter free play can act as a signal that the daytime is coming to an end.
- Warm bath – a warm bubble bath can be soothing, helping the child's body and brain to relax and wind down.
- Comforting sounds – Familiar sounds as suggested can be soothing, sound machines containing for example eight sounds such as white noise, heartbeats, rain, ocean and streams are available to buy.
- Maintaining the bedroom as a restful place free from too many stimulating features such as televisions or computers, can help.
- Ensure the colour of the bedroom is not over stimulating, choose paler/neutral colours
- Position the bed so that the child is not distracted by lights or movement from outside windows.
- Discourage child from playing with computers or watching TV for at least half an hour before going to bed. Do a quiet activity instead.

Strategies:

- For some children deep pressure touch experiences, where they gain firm touch over a large area of their body, can be calming and may help to settle themselves to sleep.
- It is important to be aware of your child's reaction to any of the following activities and to stop if necessary, but the techniques should be trialled in a graded manner and put into part of their routine to see if they find the input useful once used to it:
 - Make a "child sandwich" – ask your child to lie between two sofa cushions. Gently add pressure as you pretend to put on cheese, tomatoes, sauces etc. You can also make a "hot dog" by rolling him up in a rug, duvet or yoga mat.
 - During bath time encourage your child to rub his body with a variety of textures such as shaving foam, textured soap, loofa sponges or brushes. Encourage them to dry themselves firmly with a towel to provide additional deep pressure or dry them applying



firm touch rather than light touch.

- Try using a heavy blanket or tucked in sheets or sleeping bag instead of a light duvet. Heavy pressure has a calming effect.
- Give your child a bear hug or encourage them to hug themselves tightly.
- Ask your child to lie on his tummy and use a gym ball to apply pressure; rolling the ball up his legs, over the back, up to the head (do not roll over the head or bottom) and down each arm and over the hands.

