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Children's & Young People's Occupational Therapy Service

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Healthy sleep advice for children

Information leaflet for parents/carers

Why do we need sleep?

Sleep is essential to ensure we are healthy and ready to engage in what life has to offer. Going to sleep and getting enough sleep are important skills for children to learn. Sleep helps to ensure that children are able to play and are ready to participate in day-to-day activities at school or at home and it promotes growth and development.

Understanding the basics about sleep can help you think about why your child may be having sleep difficulties. When your child has a sleep difficulty it can be tempting to compare their sleep with that of other children. Remember that all children are individuals and making comparisons is not helpful. If your child is not sleeping you may feel as if you are failing but remember – all parents go through difficulties establishing good sleeping habits with their children.

A poor night's sleep can interfere with a child's performance and behaviour the following day. Have you thought about the following:-

Is your child's bedroom sleep friendly?

- **Room temperature:** is your child too hot or too cold? Ideally the temperature in the bedroom should be between 16 C and 20 C.
- **Bed and bed position:** a comfortable bed is essential; if possible keep the bed away from draughts and radiators.
- **Noise:** not too noisy or too quiet. A safe, restful place.
- **Light:** is the room dark enough? You may consider buying black-out blinds to make the room darker. However, if your child is afraid of the dark you may consider introducing a soft night light as bright artificial light can disturb their sleep pattern.
- **TV and Gadgets:** Try to keep your child's bedroom a TV /Mobile phone/ I Pad gadget free zone. However, if this is not possible ensure they are switched off. Charging gadgets should be organised outside of the bedroom. TV's and screens give out a blue artificial light which stops the brain from producing its 'sleepy hormone' (melatonin) and this interferes with sleep.
- **An over stimulating bedroom:** de-cluttering the bedroom before sleep e.g. picking up toys, removing rubbish, picking up clothes off the floor.

Do you have a bedtime routine?

Children tend to thrive on routines. Try to keep regular times for going to bed and getting up. Winding down is a very important stage in preparing your child for bed.

Quiet play is needed before bedtime to give the child an idea that sleep is the next step. You need to start your bedtime routine about an hour before you want your child to settle to sleep.

Falling asleep may be difficult for your child if they are too hungry, too full or thirsty. Caffeine can prevent restful sleep so avoid drinks/food with caffeine for a few hours before bed e.g. tea, coffee, coke, chocolate.

Good habits for getting to sleep will help to manage night time waking. Be aware of how your child gets to sleep as this indicates their ability in self-soothing. If you have to attend to your child waking then limit stimuli as much as you can; use dim lights and quiet sounds.

An example of a good bedtime routine could be:-

- Quiet play e.g. colouring, jigsaws, board game, cards
- Last snack/ drink
- Warm bath (not hot) to relax
- Put pyjamas on
- Brush teeth
- Go to the toilet
- Cuddle/story/song or if child is older give them time to read or listen to relaxing music.
- Use a regular phrase to end the routine e.g. 'Good night', 'have a good sleep'.

Select a bedtime routine that you feel is right for your child based on his or her age. If you have multiple children you may want different bedtimes for each child. Bedtime routines need to work for you and your family and must be consistent.

Be aware that children's sleep patterns can change especially during puberty.

Remember: Good sleep habits last a lifetime!

Additional advice and useful websites:

www.nhs.uk/livewell/childrenssleep

www.nhs.uk/liveswell/childrenssleep/pages/teensleeptips

www.ncb.org.uk/media/875230/earlysupportsleepfinal2.pdf

www.sleepcouncil.com – The good-night guide for children

Useful resources: www.amazon.co.uk – Gro-Clock Sleep trainer, Lullaby CD's for children and babies, Ewan the dream sheep, *Dr Suess 'Sleep Softly Book'*