Guide to Sleep

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Sleep

Sleep issues are a huge topic of frustration for parents.

Research has shown that children with additional needs are more likely to have sleep issues than other children. There are a number of reasons for this which include:

- Learning difficulties
- Behavioural issues
- Physical discomfort
- Medical matters
- Sensory issues
- Inability to self-settle

Sleep

Understanding the basics about sleep can help you to identify why your child may be having difficulties sleeping. It can be temping to compare your child's sleep issues with those of another child but everyone is different so making comparisons is not helpful…

Throughout this talk, we will explore reasons ***why*** your child may have difficulty sleeping and suggest ways of improving their sleep patterns.

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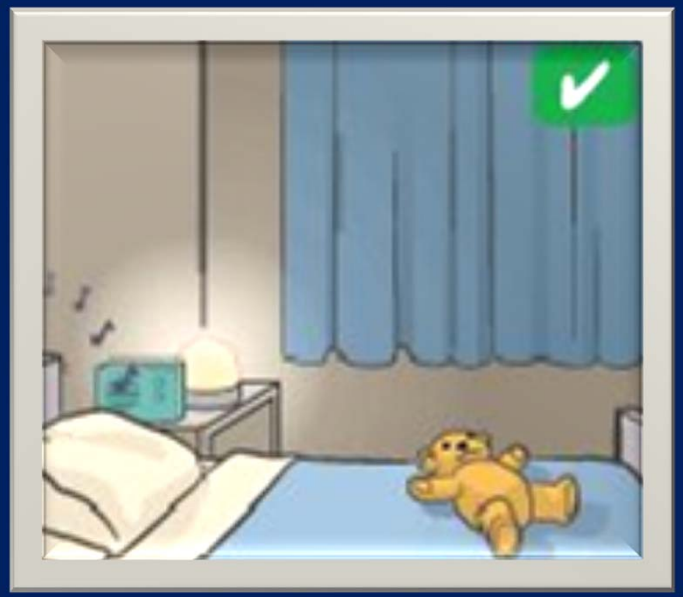
Sleep Environment

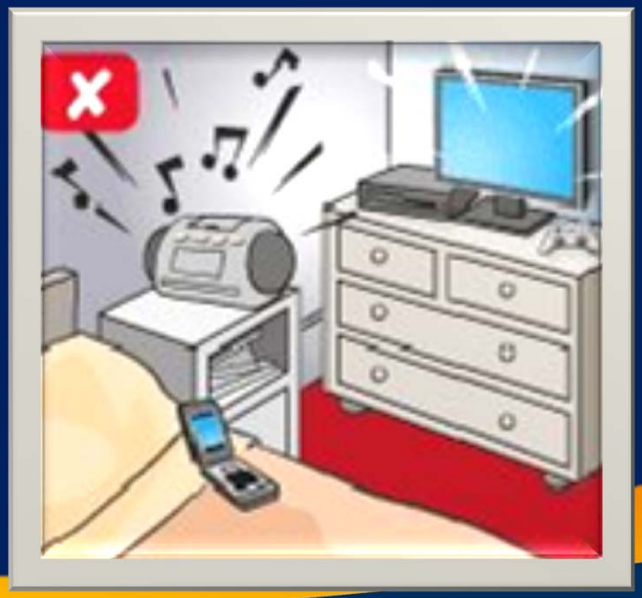
One of the best things you can do to help your child learn to sleep is to create a "sleep-friendly environment".

This means two things:

- An environment that is conducive to sleep
- Safe

Going to bed should be a calm and peaceful experience for children.





Sleep Environment

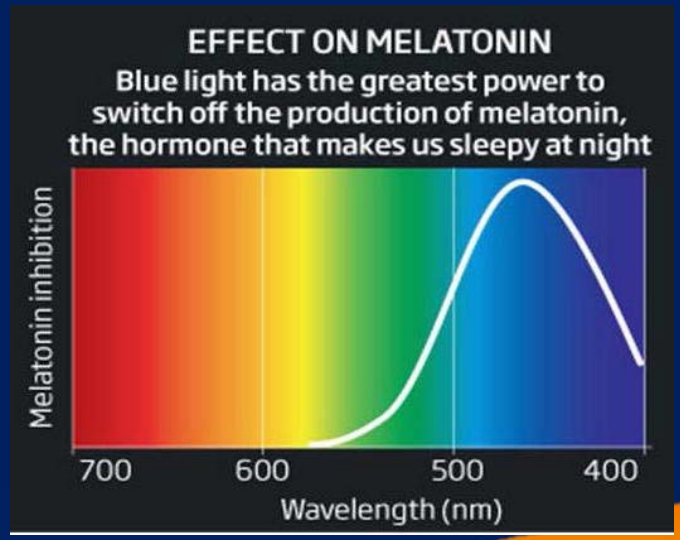
Light

Is the room dark enough? Managing your child's exposure to light in their bedroom is essential as darkness gives a visual cue that it's night time- it's time to sleep!

Darkness also helps to release melatonin, the body's "sleep hormone". Not only does this hormone help us to go to sleep initially, but it also helps us stay asleep for longer overnight.

Consider…

- Blocking out street lights, natural light from entering the room using window blinds, blackout curtains, heavy drapes
- Turn main lights off- bright lights stimulate the brain and stop our bodies from feeling relaxed
- The right colour lighting- different colours of light can have huge effects on sleep. White, blue and green based lights (however dim) will inhibit your child's melatonin at night by tricking the brain into believing it is still day light!



Red is the least disruptive. Red light has a much higher wavelength which research shows does not inhibit melatonin.

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Once in bed go RED!

Red night light- Amazon

Red light bulb- Maplin's, Homebase, Argos

Ewan The Dream Sheep

Welltop multicolour LED night light- Set to red only!

Christmas lights

Aromatherapy Diffuser/Red Night Light Combination

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Sleep Environment

Noise

Is there any noise inside or outside the home that may be disturbing your child? Some children with sensory issues are hypersensitive to noise. What may seem like a quiet sound to us can seem very loud to them.

Consider…

- Blocking other sounds using a calming CD , white noise machine, an electric fan
- Carpets or rugs as they absorb sounds
- Wearing noise cancelling headphones

Temperature

Is your child too hot or cold? Your child's sleep environment should be a comfortable temperature between 16 to 20 degrees Celsius. It can sometimes be difficult to judge the temperature of the room therefore using a room thermometer will ensure that the room is kept at a safe temperature

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Sleep Environment

Distractions

The bedroom must become a visually calm, quiet space for all the senses!
Keeping your child's room free from distractions lets them focus on their sleeping. When putting your child down after a calm, quiet routine the last thing you want to do is offer loud, light up musical toys that capture their attention and increases their alertness.

Consider…
Tidying the bedroom, toys in boxes with lids, removing any colourful posters, rugs, duvets that are too stimulating

Comfort

Some children are sensitive to certain textures; try to experiment with different nightwear until you find something your child feels comfortable in. Try to think carefully-Is your child's bed comfortable? Do they have enough pressure on them from their duvet/blankets or too much? Is their pillow soft enough? Or too soft?

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Screens

Screens can affect sleep negatively in two ways:

1. The impact of the *blue light source* that is emitted, as this influences the production of melatonin, the sleep hormone and keeps children from feeling tired
2. The stimulating effect that screens can have on the brain. Engaging the brain with exciting and stimulating TV shows before bed (even if they appear soft and calming) may lead to the release of hormones such as adrenaline which can reduce the ability to fall and maintain asleep.

Swap the screen time for some simple quiet time activities to help them unwind and to slowly bring down the levels of stimulation before bed time.

Tip: turn night shift on

Quiet time activity examples…

Quiet time box

Create a box full of quiet activities to help your child wind down and to slowly bring down the levels of stimulation

These boxes will look different for each child…

- Try to be as creative as possible to make these activities personalised and tailored to **YOUR** child's interests.
- Rotate the activities on a regular basis so your child doesn't get bored.
- Find a special area where this time takes place; you could consider putting the box on a certain rug/mat which represents 'quiet time'.

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Bedtime Routine

Routines are very important at bedtime. A calming routine which follows a predictable pattern helps signal *'it is time to go to sleep'*. The same things need to happen in the same order every night for a bed time routine to be successful It will also allow your child to feel safe and reassured, as they will always know what is about to happen next.

What does your child's bedtime routine include?

Bedtime Routine

Here are some things to consider…

- Appropriate routine
- Visual schedule that your child will understand- checklists, pictures, symbols, photographs or objects
- Use the same icon consistently to represent the same activity i.e. only use one bath icon to represent "bath time".
- Transition songs
- Limit the number of activities (routine should take no longer than 30 minutes)
- Makaton signs
- Social stories

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Over to you!!!

Name, Name, go to bed, it's time to lay your sleepy head.
Close your eyes and go to sleep, rest your little hands and feet.
Name, Name, go to bed, it's time to lay your sleepy head.

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How your child falls asleep

Sleep Associations and the importance of self settling

One of the main reasons why children have difficulties in independently falling asleep is because of the associations they have developed with night time and falling asleep.
Some children rely on certain conditions to be able to settle themselves to sleep. For example, a child may need the **television** to be on, or an **iPad** to be playing or their **parent present**.

Just like adults, children sleep in cycles consisting of deep sleep and light sleep. At the end of each cycle we all enter a stage of extremely light sleep and often wake up briefly during this time. Adults and children who have learnt how to sleep independently, just fall back to sleep straight away. However, if your child has not learnt to self settle, when they come into a lighter sleep and are awake enough to realise their original sleep environment is different i.e.no longer with an adult, televisions/ipads have been switched off ,they are likely to wake up fully and need help getting back to sleep.

This is why it is so important that your child is able to fall asleep independently at bedtime; this way they have a better chance to transition from one sleep cycle to the next and continue throughout the night.

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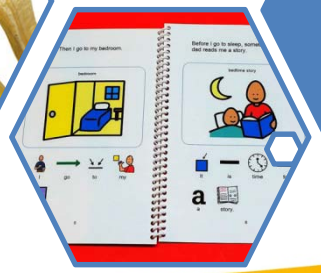
Tips for Self settling…

Comforter or bedtime sensory toy

White noise

Create the perfect sleep environment

Sleep inducing snack one hour before bed



Reward charts

Social stories/visuals

Early bedtime to prevent overtiredness

Exercise/fresh air throughout the day

Relaxation techniques

Gradually moving further away from child's bed each night

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Bedtime tools

Every child is different, its up to parents to consider each factor as well as some trail and error when it comes to what works and what doesn't.

Try a combination of these ideas..

- Deep pressure- experiment with different pressures
- Weighted blankets
- Include sensory input in your child's bedtime routine- What are your child's sensory needs?
- Sensory retreat- a safe place to be removed from overwhelming sensory stimuli
- Sleep Sac
- Sleep training clocks
- Bedtime Box

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Night Waking: Keeping a Sleep Diary…

SLEEP DIARY

Child: Jessica Week Of: September 10 - 16

Day	Time Put To Bed	Time Fell Asleep	Nighttime Waking (time/how long)	Describe Nighttime Waking	Time Awoke	Describe Any Naps
Sunday	*Record the time your child was put to bed.*	*Record the time your child actually fell asleep.*	*Record the time your child woke up and for how long he was awake (e.g., 20 minutes, 1 hour, etc).*	*Explain or write the details of how/why your child woke up. (e.g., Was it something in the environment such as a loud noise? Is your child sick? Was your child crying? Did he have a nightmare?)*	*If your child fell asleep again after the Nighttime Waking, what time did he get up in the morning?*	*Record any naps that your may have taken during the day and for how long.*
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						

A sleep diary is a simple but effective way of getting an insight into your child's sleep patterns and habits.

Sleep diaries can be helpful in identifying reasons ***why*** your child is not sleeping.

They are also useful for tracking progress!

Understanding the reasons *why* your child is not sleeping can help you work out strategies to promote healthy sleep patterns.

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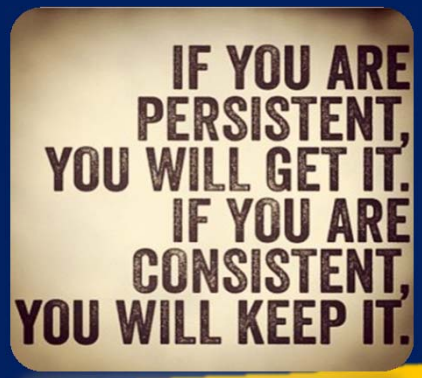
Sleep Training

- ✓ Medical issues
- ✓ Environmental conditions
- ✓ Bedtime routines

→ How are you going to teach your child to sleep through the night???

Sleep training needs to be tailored to your child's individual needs and family lifestyle e.g. siblings, communication, understanding, anxiety, medical conditions, behavioural issues- all need to be taken into consideration.

Whichever approach you decide to use- the key is to be consistent and not to give up!



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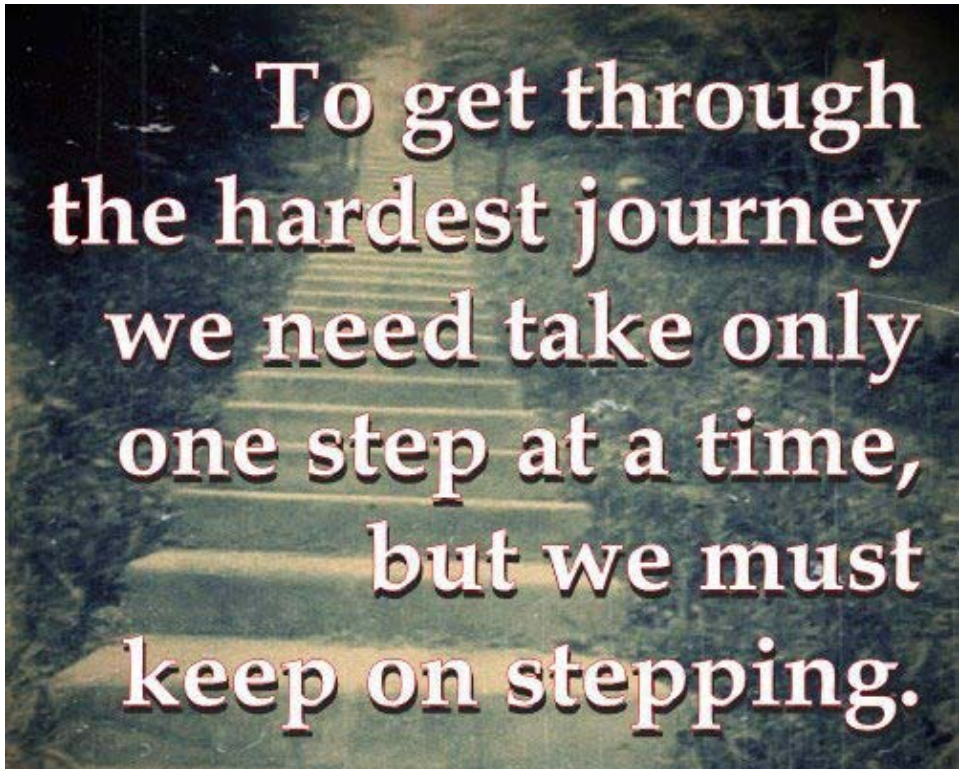
Remember…



The first step is always the hardest but the results will be worth it!

We want to continue to support families the best we can.

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Useful websites & Resources

- www.tiredout.org.uk
- www.gro-store.com
- www.autism.org.uk
- www.scope.org.uk
- www.simplestuffworks.co.uk
- www.snugglesac.com
- http://ginadavies.co.uk/
- http://www.riversideschool.org.uk/

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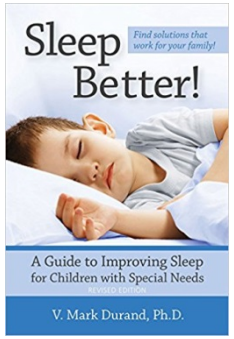

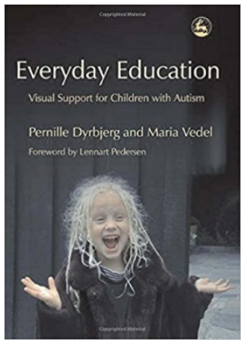

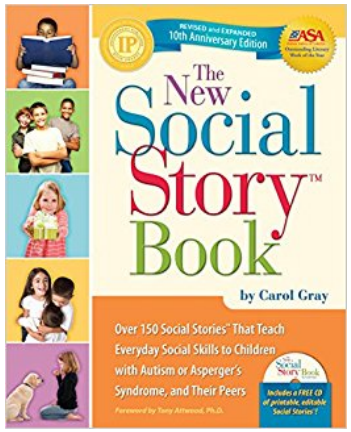

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