

Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



Sleeping Tots

Sleeping advice and strategies for
parents/Guardians

Bedtime Routine**DURING THE DAY**

Encourage your child to be active during the day and spend some of the day outside. This will give them exposure to natural daylight and help them to feel tired at the end of the day with the benefit of a more restful sleep.

BEDTIME

It is important to decide on a bedtime which is suitable for your child's age. Putting them to bed at the same time each night and waking them at the same time each morning; including at weekends will regulate their body clock and help them to develop a regular sleep and wake cycle.

THE BEDROOM

To help your child get a good night's sleep there may be changes you can make within their bedroom. The room should be a comfortable temperature being neither too warm nor too cold. A quiet, dark, calm environment with toys tidied away will encourage sleep. Use a nightlight if your child is frightened of the dark. Try not to have a blue or white light as these stimulate wakefulness, whereas pale red/ pink/ orange type colours will promote sleep. Where possible reduce any external noise within the household.

FOOD AND DRINK

Encourage a healthy diet with regular meal times. Avoid a large meal too close to bedtime. Having a light snack at bedtime will ensure your child is not hungry and can help them to settle to sleep e.g. a drink of milk and slice of whole-meal toast. Caffeine has a stimulant effect and can prevent people from feeling tired. Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, chocolate, cola, fizzy drinks and energy drinks. These should always be avoided in the afternoon and evening and should be limited throughout the day.

**ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY**

TV's, phones and tablets should be removed or turned off at least 1 hour before bed. The blue light emitted by these devices interferes with the production of melatonin, a hormone which regulates the sleep-awake cycle.

PREPERATION FOR BED

Consider beginning the bedtime routine at least 30 minutes before actual bedtime if not longer. A few minutes between the announcement 'it's time for bed' and 'lights out' is not enough time for a sensory child's body to adjust.

Sensory Based Sleep Tips

Movement

- Although children need a lot of movement in the day they should switch to quiet play at least 1 hour before bed time.
- Slow rhythmic movement such as gently rocking over an exercise ball or indoor swing prior to sleep can be calming for some children.
- Pushing and pulling activities before bed can also help to regulate the sensory system ready for sleep. Examples of these can be found in the booklet entitled 'Making sense of sensory behaviour'.

Touch and Texture:

- Snuggle, hug and offer your child a firm, maintained touch pressure massage as tolerated.
- Try to respect texture preferences- for example silky or flannel sheets, tight or loose pyjama's, and avoid itchy or irritating lace, textures, or tags.
- Consider use of different weighted bedding. Some children respond well to heavy duvets whilst others prefer lighter weight bedding.

Sight and Sound:

- Some children like to listen to soft, rhythmic music or white noise whilst others may prefer listening to a children's meditation sleep story. You can find these online or on apps such as Spotify, or the Calm app. Other children may prefer a quiet sleep space free from background sound.
- A lava lamp or a projected sensory light can be calming for some children depending on your child preferences. Consider when buying a light the intensity of colour, movement and brightness as some can be over stimulating.
- Consider the use of Blackout blinds or heavy curtains to limit light and sound coming in to the room. Some children would benefit from a 'over the bed tent' to block out visual distractions.

Smell:

- Using calming scents in an air diffuser can also help to settle to sleep. Experiment with different smells to find your child's preference.
- Offer your child a soft toy or piece of your clothing scented with a familiar smell. This could be your natural scent or familiar perfume for example.
- Keep in mind that some children can be hyper-sensitive to smells, so consider washing detergents, air fresheners and cleaning products you may use in the house hold.

Visual cues:

- Try using a visual schedule or sensory story to help you child understand the bedtime routine.
- Try to keep the room decoration calming with soft muted colours and reduce visual clutter.

BEDS

For a child with sleeping difficulties, keeping a child safe and secure during the night can pose a difficulty. There are many beds on the commercial market place that can support your child's sleep need.

BED TENTS

Bed tents can provide a safe space for your child whilst also giving them an opportunity to take themselves away from others if they are in need of some quiet time.

**FLOOR BASED BEDS**

Floor based beds can reduce the risk of a child climbing and falling. They also allow your child to independently get in and out of bed without adult support.

