

Sleep guidance

Sleep is really important for good mental health and wellbeing. If children and young people do not get enough sleep they can:

- have problems with attention and concentration which can look like ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) or make diagnosed ADHD worse
- have difficulties with their learning, not just paying attention but also making new memories
- become anxious
- become sad or appear depressed
- struggle to develop motor skills and coordination
- be more likely to be involved in an accident and get hurt
- be more vulnerable to catching new infections or take longer to recover when they have caught an infection, as the immune system does not work properly
- have reduced growth
- get involved in using illicit drugs

On average this is how much sleep we need at different ages:

		Age	Total hours (per 24 hour day)
Babies	Newborns	0 – 4 months	14 – 15 hours (including naps)
	Infants	5 – 12 months	12 – 16 hours (including naps)
Toddlers		1 – 2 years	11 – 14 hours (including naps)
Children	Preschool	3 – 5 years	10 – 13 hours (including naps)
	School age	6 – 12 years	9 – 12 hours
Young people / adolescents		13 – 17 years	8 – 10 hours
Young adults		18 – 25 years	7 - 9 hours

There are some things we can do to help children and young people sleep better / more. For example:

- Make sure they have exercise, preferably outdoors, during the daytime.
- Make sure their bedroom is fit for sleep – not too bright (close blinds/curtains and keep lights to a minimum), not too noisy, not too hot or too cold, a comfy bed with their choice of bedding. Try to make sure they do not spend all their free-time in their bedroom or their brain can get confused about what they are meant to be doing in there.
- Keep to a routine – this includes both timings for going to bed and getting up; generally try to keep to similar timings on school days, weekends and school holidays. If timings do change, try to keep within an hour of normal timings.
- Turn devices off at least an hour before bedtime – this includes phones, computer games, handheld consoles, TV. Ideally remove devices from their bedroom.
- Do the same things every evening to get ready for bed e.g. a warm bath or shower, putting on pyjamas, a light supper (milky drink and a banana, piece of wholemeal toast or a couple of plain digestives), brushing teeth, quiet time (cuddling up to watch a gentle TV programme or read a story together), drawing or puzzles (on paper, not on a device).
- Having a favourite cuddly toy or comfort blanket is common in young children but can be helpful through middle childhood and into adolescence.
- Do not do anything too exciting or stimulating just before bedtime e.g. running about, rough and tumble play, arguments.
- Reduce caffeinated drinks (e.g. cola, coffee) or energy drinks throughout the day but especially in the evenings.
- Basic relaxation technique including breathing and guided imagery can help.
- Set a good example, if we have good sleep habits that helps them too.

Sometimes children and young people want to sleep in their parents' bed if they are upset or worried. This can be ok for a brief period but aim to get them back in their own bed as soon as possible so that they learn to soothe themselves and are not reliant on parents/carers to do that for them.

Sometimes children and young people are scared of the dark or find silence scary. Try to keep any sort of night light as dim as possible, a landing light outside their room is better. Experiment with quiet sounds such as gentle music, white noise apps or a bedroom fan.

Children and young people who are overtired may want to nap in the daytime – keep these no later than 3pm and for no more than 30-45 minutes if possible.

Children and young people who have a neurodevelopmental disorder (such as autism, ADHD, learning difficulties/disability, sensory issues, tics/Tourette's Syndrome) may have specific sleep difficulties too, These are best discussed with their doctor – paediatrician or child and adolescent psychiatrist in case additional support or advice is needed.