



### Top Tips on Managing Sleep

This issue of the Wellbeing And Mental Health in Schools newsletter focuses on **sleep**. Getting children to bed on time – and sleeping well yourself! – can be a big challenge. It may be even harder than usual if the pandemic has led to lots of changes in your routine. If sleep is a problem for your family - you're not alone! One in every three children has some kind of sleep difficulty.

#### How much sleep do children need?

Children need less sleep as they get older. On average this looks like...

- 4 - 5 years: 11-12 hours
- 6 - 9 years: 10-11 hours
- 10 - 12 years: 9-10 hours

From age 4 and up children should be getting all those hours of sleep at night, without the need for naps during the day, unless they're unwell.

**But...** every child is different! You know your child best, and if they're having trouble waking up in the morning or are tired in the day, they might need more sleep than this!

#### Wind-down times

Start preparing for bed with a wind-down time that starts an hour before bed. Agreeing a wind-down time in advance, and reminding your child that the wind-down time has started, lets them prepare their minds for the transition into sleep.

This might include...

- Finishing up games that are loud or active, and switching to quieter play
- Finishing up with using screens
- Having a bath or washing up
- Changing into pyjamas
- Moving into a bedtime routine with **Shift, Snuggle, and Snooze**

Consider talking with your children about what they want to do as part of the wind-down time – if they've had a part in deciding it they may be more willing to stick to it!

**Consistency is key** – it might be hard for your child to switch back and forth if your school night routine is very different from your weekend routine!

#### Top tips for sleeping well

Unless your child is unwell, try to avoid **naps** during the day.

**Screen time** is linked with poor sleep for some children – consider removing screens for at least one hour before bed!

Be mindful of **caffeine**, which can wake you up – consider avoiding this for **four hours** before bed time! Caffeine can be found in cola, coffee, tea, but also chocolate (including hot chocolate)!

Avoid **big meals** right before bed – give time to digest (a small snack is fine and may even be helpful).

**Exercise** is great for during the day – but not last thing at night! In the last hour before bedtime, try to keep games calmer and quieter, so your child is relaxed and ready for sleep.

Try to make the bedroom as **comfortable** as possible – is your child not too hot and not too cold? Is where they sleep a place they feel happy and calm? Is the room quiet (or as quiet as possible?)

A new **sleep routine** is best started on a Friday night, so you and your child have time to get used to it without needing to worry if it doesn't go right first time!

**Finally... remember to cover your BACES!** Managing your routine and managing sleep is part of covering your **BACES** – see the newsletter on **Screentime** for more information on this!

## Shift, Snuggle, Snooze – a shortcut to understanding bedtime routines!

**Shift-** Shift activities take less than 10 minutes and end with getting into bed (e.g. having a light snack, brushing teeth, saying goodnight to pets).

**Snuggle** - Snuggle activities are what you do once you get into bed to help you settle down for the night. They should take about 15 minutes (e.g. read a book, listen to an audible or have a cuddle).

**Snooze** - The snooze activity is the thing that happens as you are finding your favourite position and closing your eyes. It might involve a goodnight kiss and a phrase that you repeat each night (e.g. “goodnight, sleep tight”).

If your child won't settle or gets up after the end of the routine, one key tip is to **be boring** – don't ignore them, but avoid more games or stories (*repeat **snooze** activities – don't start again from the top!*).

## Top tips for managing night-time waking

Waking at night happens for lots of reasons – it might be nightmares, or just not feeling comfortable in bed. Talk to your child about what the problem is! If they're having difficulty finding the right words, try being creative – maybe they can draw you a picture of them in bed, or use their toys to show you a story about trying to go to sleep, and you can talk together about what the problems are.

- If your child is afraid of the dark, provide a **nightlight**.
- Provide **reassurance** to your child that you will always be there in the next room.
- Be **understanding** – go to their room and cuddle them, and don't say that dreams are silly or ridiculous, because they will feel very real to your child. Encourage them to think about something good - for instance, you could encourage them to come up with a good ending to a bad dream!
- **But... don't let them stay in your bed just because they're having trouble sleeping!** Return your child to bed as many times as is necessary. If you let your child stay with you because they're finding it hard to sleep, it can give the message that they can't manage on their own.
- Set up a **sticker chart** – reward your child with a sticker each time they manage to sleep through the night without coming into your room. Stickers can be traded in for something special.

## For more ideas...

Workbooks like '**What to Do When You Dread Your Bed**' by Dawn Huebner can offer lots of strategies for you and your child.

Apps like **Insight Timer** have sleep meditation tracks for children and relaxation tools that can help children unwind and prepare for sleep. This app is also free!

## If this newsletter hasn't answered your questions...

If you're concerned about the sleep of an older or younger child and aren't sure if these ideas will work...

If you've tried these techniques and you're still having problems...

If you or your family are getting upset or stressed about sleep problems....

If you're concerned about sleep walking, night-terrors, or other disturbances to sleep...

...you can contact **First Steps** and have a conversation with them about it. They may be able to give you more information, have new suggestions, or offer you some sessions to support you and your family.

**First Steps contact details: 020 7014 7135 (9am – 5pm Monday to Friday)**  
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