



Sleep

Children can experience difficulties settling and falling asleep and/or staying asleep. A lack of sleep can have a huge impact on the child themselves, as well as the whole family. The following lists potential factors to consider, as well as some strategies that could be used to help your child get a better night's sleep.

Room temperature

Is your child getting too hot or too cold? Having a thermometer hanging in your child's room can help. Ideally, the temperature should remain between 16°C and 20°C. Your child may also find it difficult to regulate their own body temperature. A body temperature thermometer may be useful to check that their core temperature is between 36.5°C and 37.5°C.



Imagine: Freepik.com

Background noise

Are there any noises inside or outside the home that could be distracting for your child? Some children may find it difficult to block out background noise, which could keep their attention heightened throughout the night. Children with sensory issues may be particularly sensitive to noises, e.g: ticking clocks, or leaving devices on standby as they make a noise. Conversely, some children may find background noise soothing and it may help them settle. Bubble lamps, relaxing music and sounds such as waves may be calming.



Distractions

Try to limit the amount of toys and electronics kept in your child's room. If engaging things are still in earshot and eyesight, this can suggest that the bedroom is an environment for playing rather than sleeping. It may be helpful to avoid bright colours, patterns or lots of pictures on the walls. You may want to allocate a time to complete a tidy-up routine before bedtime to move the focus from play to sleep.

Pain

Is your child experiencing any pain? Children with communication difficulties may find it hard to express that they are in pain or discomfort due to sleep positioning or perhaps dreaming during the night. Visual aids could be a great way to support your child in sharing this with you.

Children with movement difficulties may struggle to position themselves and get comfortable. This could then result in them being in pain and discomfort. Have you received advice regarding night time positioning systems from a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist? (please ask SNAP for more information on Postural Care).

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Lack of routine

Have you implemented a good bedtime routine? Has this been disrupted because of an event such as a school holiday?

A routine could look like: bath time, a drying massage, putting on pyjamas, brushing teeth, going to the toilet, having a chat, singing a song, reading a book, quiet time.

Visual aids are a great way to support a bedtime routine, helping your child understand the order of events and what is going to happen next on the lead up to sleeping.



The unknown can cause anxiety and distress which can lead to a disruption of falling asleep and/or staying asleep. By having a clear process, you can help to minimise any stresses or worries that your child may have.

Comfort

Is their bed comfortable? Do they feel secure? If your child struggles with sensory issues, are they being tucked in tightly enough? Many children can feel lost in their bed. By tucking blankets and soft toys around them, it may help them to feel supported enough to be comfortable falling asleep in bed on their own.

Sensory needs

Children with sensory needs may find it hard to settle. Strategies to try using include:

Looking at different types of nightwear - try tight or loose pyjamas to identify which type your child prefers. It may be worth avoiding pyjamas that have built-in feet, as this may cause irritation to a child with an over-responsiveness to touch.

If your child likes pressure and you often find their covers are falling off during the night, you could try using a sleeping bag or a compression blanket as an alternative.



Light

Is your child's room too dark or too light for your child? It may help to use a night light or black-out curtains. Try lying on their bed to see light and shadows from your child's perspective.





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Further support

If you have thought about and implemented some of these strategies and you feel you have a good bedtime routine for your child but they are still having difficulty falling and/or staying asleep; do contact your health visitor, paediatrician or GP for advice. There may be some further help available via the health services.

Online support and book recommendations



Sleep Better! A Guide to Improving Sleep for Children with Special Needs - V. Mark Durand



Sleep well on the Autism Spectrum - Kenneth J. Aitken

- <https://contact.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Helping-your-child-sleep.pdf>
- [Parents and families \(autism.org.uk\)](https://autism.org.uk/)
- <https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/sleep-topics/behavioural-problems-in-school-aged-children>
- <https://teensleephub.org.uk/e-book/>
- <https://connect.humber.nhs.uk/resource/bedtime-and-sleep/>
- [sleep-guide-may22-low-res.pdf \(cerebra.org.uk\)](#)
- [Children - The Sleep Charity](#)
- [Helping your disabled child sleep | Disability charity Scope UK](#)
- <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Good-sleep-habits-for-children-with-Learning-Difficulties.pdf>
- <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Sensory-Sleep-Strategies.pdf>
- [Sleep Problems in Autistic and ADHD Children — Sensory Sorted](#)
- [Parents and families](#)
- [What to do if a child with ADHD cannot sleep: 6 tips](#)

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