

INTRODUCING A SLEEP ROUTINE

What is a sleep routine?

A consistent predictable set of actions before lights out.

Think about your bedtime routine?

- What do you wear?
- How light or dark is your room?
- Do you fall to sleep in a certain position?
- Do use pillows?
- Do you sleep on a certain side of the bed?
- Do you read before you go to sleep?

These are your sleep associations.

As adults we can form our own bedtime routine tailored to our needs – children can't!

What are the benefits of a sleep routine?

A bedtime routine is important in getting a good night's sleep. A routine helps support children's body clock and aid relaxation. Think of it as laying the foundations for the rest of their life. We know that building these foundations leads to healthier, happier children. It can support them to sleep better in the long run, aid their readiness to learn and support their learning and development outcomes. Birth to 2-3 years of age is the peak age for brain development in children. Their brains are shaping and molding rapidly. 12 months is the perfect time to start thinking about their bedtime routine.

Helpful tips-

- Consistency is key. Sometimes sleep patterns may get worse before they get better. Stick to it for at least two weeks to see results.
- Take time to plan your routine, write it down and display it somewhere in the home for all to follow.
- Start it an hour before your child goes to sleep.
- Do the same things at the same time every day, including a set wake up time in the morning (including weekends). This will support your child's body clock.
- Switch off all screens at the start of the routine, these may suppress the body's production of melatonin, the sleep hormone and make it harder for your child to fall to sleep.
- Dimming the lights aids relaxation and provides a cue that bedtime is approaching
- A light snack may be helpful. Avoid heavy meals as they can make it hard to fall sleep. Be mindful that if your child is waking early, it may be because of hunger. What your child eats during the day may impact their sleep. Avoid sugar, including natural sugar in fruit and fruit juice and caffeine found in tea, coffee, hot chocolate, and fizzy drinks. These can all cause a rush of energy. Sleepy food suggestions – Bananas. Dairy – milk, yogurt, cheese. Cereal, though avoid sugar coated cereals.

More information on food to support children's sleep can be found here:

<https://library.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/sleepy-foods/>

- Baths can offer further relaxation and an opportunity for some calm play, singing or nursery rhymes. All of which offer a time for you and your child to connect and enjoy each other. Talking to your child, singing, nursery rhymes and bath books will support their language development. Keeping towels and pyjamas warm on the radiator will keep them cosy and relaxed after bath.
- Prior to going to bed make sure your child's nappy is dry or they have chance to use the potty/toilet. This helps to reduce toileting being a cause for difficulty sleeping and set good toilet routine prior to bed.
- Do your child's teeth last thing before heading to bed. Doing their teeth after any snack/drink including milk will ensure teeth are clean and protected all night. This will help set a good habit for life and help to significantly reduce dental problems. Sing them a song or lullaby whilst you do them. Make it enjoyable for you both. You could use the same one each time you brush their teeth as a cue or make one up!

- Reading together before bed is the ideal time to embed reading into your child's day. All babies and children benefit from reading. They love the sound of your voice, being close to you and seeing your face. Their brains are soaking up everything. It is never too early to support their development of language, communication & literacy skills. It really does help these skills in the long term.
- A massage, rocking and cuddles at bedtime will make your child feel safe and secure. This helps you both develop your bond and attachment. All children need to feel safe, secure, and loved; this allows them to develop to their full potential. This time is important for you too, it is a time for you to quietly come together with your child, give them all your attention and enjoy them. It's something to look forward to in your day.

Establishing a bedtime routine really can-

- Support your child's sleep in the long term.
- Have a positive impact on your child's mood.
- Enhance your child's emotional & behavioural regulation.
- Greatly benefit your child's development.
- Have a positive impact on parent's mood.
- Improve parent's relationships.

Further reading: <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/>