



## Therapy for Children

### Help for parents/carers - sleep problems



#### Understanding why sleep is so important

Sleep is essential to support children's development. Well rested children are more able to meet their full potential in every aspect of their lives and it usually leads to a happier home. Listed below are just a few of the symptoms of sleep deprivation in children:

- ❖ Growth or hormone issues
- ❖ Concentration difficulties
- ❖ Mental health issues
- ❖ Lowering of the immune system
- ❖ Hyperactivity
- ❖ Weight gain
- ❖ Behavioural issues
- ❖ Difficulty remembering things



#### How much sleep is needed in school age children?

Children around the age of four to six years old need between 10.5 and 11.5 hours of sleep on average. And as they move through school they are likely to need around 10 hours each night. Teenagers' need around eight to nine hours but often get much less than this. It's important to remember if your child sleeps less or more than the average it's not always an issue!

#### Suggestions for parents

- Everything should be done with love. Getting angry will make things worse and it is not your child's fault. Recognise you have given your child control over his sleep and you need to take it back. Be self-compassionate and don't blame yourself – this won't help either. You just haven't managed to find the right approach yet, that works for you both.
- Be kind and believe in yourself. It is your job as a parent role to get back the control over sleep that they are currently holding.
- Reassure yourself it takes 2 weeks at least to make a change
- Start with establishing a calm, consistent and relaxing **bedtime routines**. This is a crucial first step towards solving sleep problems. Once planned, stick to it. Be persistent, loving and firm:
  - Agree on a time and work backwards
  - Screens off an hour before
  - Offer some quiet activities that are motivating to your child, like jigsaws, lego, colouring or puzzles.
  - Consider a little supper time snack. Dairy products are very calming
  - Bath time is hugely relaxing for a child
  - Get ready for bed in the same order – teeth hair, pyjamas etc

- Read a story in bed with them , then hugs and kisses and finally “it’s night time , off to sleep little person!”
  - Never let them go to bed on an argument - forgive and forget – every day is a fresh start .
  - Let the very last thing you show in your face is how much you love them, even if you are felling absolutely frazzled !!
- Avoid getting drawn in to conversation or argument , be boring !
  - Decide **not** to accept them getting out of bed, once they are in it, as a general rule of thumb (obviously with exceptions such as them being unwell or needing the toilet!)
  - All responses should be given with the minimum of fuss and attention.
  - Help them to un-learn bad habits (see below for more help on this)
  - Remember sometimes things get worse before they get better. Set smack achievable goals for you and be persistent, change takes time

*(based on ideas taken from “The good night guide for children” by The Sleep Council 2014)*

### Help when things have got out of hand

If you have a problem which has become a regular occurrence, it could be that your child:

- Has no bedtime routine
- Can’t fall asleep in their own bed
- Won’t stay in their own bed
- Wakes in the night



How you respond to the problem, whatever it may be, is key to changing it. Pay attention to what is actually going on. You can adopt strategies that include gradually teaching your child the new sleep behaviour by slowly withdrawing their dependence on you, or adopting an instant all or nothing approach. There are other approaches but these two are explained further here

#### *Gradual withdrawal*

Once your little one has had all the routine you have planned and is now lying down and you have said goodnight, sit on the end of the bed to reassure them, and stay with them til they settle and start to drift off. Look away, avoid contact or conversation. If they sit up, gently but firmly lay them back down. Say quietly and gently “it’s time to go to sleep”. Keep repeating so they learn to settle themselves, and leave the room as they falling asleep. The length of time this takes will become less and less as you both learn to trust yourselves and each other and discover it works.

#### *Rapid Response*

Once your little one has had all the routine you have planned and is now lying down and you have said goodnight, leave the room. Stay outside the door and listen. If they get out of bed, return and gently but firmly lay them back down. Say quietly “it’s time to go to sleep” and leave again. If they call out ignore it. It may take many return trips and repeats but eventually it will work.

*(Taken from “Little Angels” by Tanya Bryon and Sacha Baveystock , 2005)*