****

**‘A Good Night’s Sleep’**

**Children**

We can all have difficulty sleeping for a variety of reasons, and difficulties appear to occur more frequently for autistic children and those with other neurodevelopmental conditions. **Please see the following 10 tips which could help you as a parent/ caregiver to help your child get a good night’s sleep**

|  |
| --- |
| 1. **Daily Structure- What time does your child wake in the morning and go to bed at night?**

Try and establish a clear structure to the day, wake your child at the same time, keep bedtime the same each night. This will help your child understand that there is structure to each day, each day follows a similar pattern and routine. Consider using a social story ‘Getting ready for bed and sleep?’ If your child has to get up earlier one day or go to bed later for example, because you are having a day out or are going to a family wedding don’t worry. You can explain in advance and prepare them for the change. Make sure that, as much as possible, your child understands that this will not be happening all the time. Again, you could consider using a social story to explain why this is happening and when you will be returning to the usual routine. 1. **Food and Drink- What does your child eat and drink throughout the day?**

Check that your child is having a balanced diet throughout the day, with the lightest meal nearer to bedtime, a milky drink can help early in the evening but not straight before bed. If your child has a drink like coke as a treat, try and limit to this to earlier on in the day, ideally in the morning.1. **Rhythm of the Day- Does your child move around during the day?**

Getting your child to move around and exercise during the day will help them feel tired at night. This can be time in the garden, a walk in the park, riding a bike or jumping on a trampoline. If your child is finding it difficult to leave the house, try encouraging them to walk up and down the stairs, or dance and move around to their favourite music. If it is just before bedtime relaxing exercises will help them to calm down. This is not a good time for lots of running around or exciting things.1. **Relax and Unwind- What does your child like to do to relax?**

It’s a really useful thing to relax and unwind to help you get ready to go to sleep. You will know what helps your child relax. It may be a warm bath, reading a story or listening to calming music. If your child has had a busy or difficult day, it may take longer for them to relax and unwind. Check with your child what kind of day they’ve had, possibly using a scale of 1-10. This could help you gauge how long it will take them to relax. Take a look at this website for some ideas to help your child relax: <http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26930/Relaxleaflet.pdf>.1. **Bedroom Detective- Is your child’s bedroom an easy space to fall and stay asleep in?**

Look at your child’s bedroom. Are the floorboards creaky, is the mattress comfortable, is there light creeping in under the door, standby lights visible, is the duvet too heavy or light? Black out blinds are great for blocking out light. For older children, an eye mask is a good way of blocking out all light. Consider the amount of ‘stuff’ that is in your child’s room, declutter! Tidy away toys and books at the end of the day, maybe put them in a box under the bed. Check the temperature of the bedroom (for most people 16c-18c works best). Are there any strong smells that may keep your child alert and awake, air fresheners, fabric conditioner? Most importantly, your child’s bedroom should be a place of relaxation.1. **Rename It, Renown It- Is anxiety hindering your child’s sleep?**

It is an anxious time for us all, your child may be worried. Try and find out what is worrying them and develop some strategies with them that may reduce their anxiety. Writing, drawing, or recording may help. It is helpful to end the day on a positive note. Try and think about something good that has happened that day.  **7. General Health- Does your child have any underlying health conditions?** **Is your child in good health?** Your child’s physical and emotional health will have an impact on their sleep. If you have concerns, you may need to seek medical (GP), or specialist help.1. **Wise use of technology. Use technology to help your child to get to sleep rather than keep them awake.**

Try and encourage your child to switch screens off an hour before bed. You may need to remove devices from your child’s bedroom at night. Sometimes this may not be possible (listening to music, meditation, ASMR requires a screen). Use timer switches and switch to night-time settings on any devices in the room. You could also track sleep on a Fitbit or phone app. This is s a good way to find out how much sleep your child is getting.**9. Dear Diary- When does your child wake and what keeps them awake?**A Sleep Diary can be a useful way to record your child’s sleep pattern and help you think about some of the things that keep your child awake. Write down the time your child wakes and sleeps, what kind of day they had- were they busy, what did they eat? Are they worrying about something? Are they really excited about something? Is there a particular day that is more difficult for them? Why do you think this is?  **10. A Daily Treat- Plan one nice thing for you and your child every day.**Now more than ever, we need to be kind to ourselves building in a daily treat, a relaxing bath, reading a book or having a bar of chocolate. Adults and children both need treats and something to look forward to. |

|  |
| --- |
| **Resources & website links**There are lots of resources and videos already available that can help you get your child to sleep, please see below:Cariad<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwXm-THeAfU>Social Stories[www.carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/)Calming Mindfulness Mediation Meditation before Sleeping<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFEnruF-dts&feature=youtu.be>Sleep Diary<https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia/Documents/sleepdiary.pdf><https://www.tiredout.org.uk/sleepdiary/the-childrens-sleep-charity> Useful websites<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/sleep.aspx>[http://www.webmd.com/brain/autism/helping-your-child-with-autism-get-a-go**od-**nights-sleep](http://www.webmd.com/brain/autism/helping-your-child-with-autism-get-a-good-nights-sleep)If you require additional support, you may need to contact your school nurse, Health Visitor or GP. |

**Anne Marie McKigney**

 **(Consultant Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychologist ABUHB)**