 **SLEEP** 

Good sleep is important for everyone and especially for your child's physical and mental wellbeing.

A relaxing bedtime routine is one important way to help your child get a good night's sleep. Doing the same relaxing things in the same order and at the same time each night helps promote good sleep:

• A warm (not hot) bath will help your child relax and get ready for sleep. 

• Keeping lights dim encourages your child's body to produce the sleep hormone, melatonin. Consider the lighting, noise levels and general “business” throughout the house as this will also effect the family’s ability to slow down and be ready for sleep.

• Once they're in bed, encourage your child to read quietly or listen to some relaxing music, or read a story together. (See more tips below.)



Know how much sleep your child needs

The amount of sleep your child needs changes as they get older.

From various sources including NHS websites to Sleep Advisory Societies will offer the following guidelines:

4 years - night-time: 11 hours 30 minutes

5 years - night-time: 11 hours

6 years - night-time: 10 hours 45 minutes

7 years - night-time: 10 hours 30 minutes

8 years - night-time: 10 hours 15 minutes

9 years - night-time: 10 hours

10 years - night-time: 9 hours 45 minutes

11 years - night-time: 9 hours 30 minutes

Avoid screens in the bedroom

Tablets, smartphones, TVs and other electronic gadgets can affect how easily children get to sleep.

Older children may also stay up late or even wake in the middle of the night to use social media.

Try to keep your child's bedroom a screen-free zone, and get them to charge their phones in another room.

Encourage your child to stop using screens at least an hour before bedtime.

Your child's bedroom

Your child's bedroom should ideally be dark, quiet and tidy. It should be well ventilated and kept at a temperature of about 16 to 20C.

Fit some thick curtains to block out any daylight. If there's noise outside, consider investing in double glazing or, for a cheaper option, offer your child earplugs.

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Foundations of a good sleeping routine.

It is generally recognised that there are three sleep “controllers” – the sleep drive, the internal body clock and the unconscious mind.

*The sleep drive and body clock need to work together to produce good sleep.*

The *“sleep drive”* is the body’s need for sleep and balances with the need for wakefulness. Our sleep drive will tell us when we have been awake long enough and that now the body needs sleep.

Our “*body clock”* is our body’s *circadian rhythm* that generally follows daylight hours. As daylight appears our body will produce hormones to increase our alertness. Similarly, when daylight decreases our body produces other hormones to help our bodies prepare for sleep. This is why unnatural light such as house lights, lights from screens and especially blue light emitted from modern day technology interferes with our natural body clock and prevents good sleep.

The Unconscious mind will interfere with our ability to rest if it is preoccupied with issues that are causing us stress/worry/fear. Often a “*racing mind”* will prevent natural ability to relax and fall asleep. Dealing with the root cause of stress will obviously help. ***Making notes*** so that the issue is not forgotten is sometimes enough to reduce the effects of the subconscious mind. *Making a plan of action* to deal with an issue can also be effective in reducing the unconscious mind’s effect on sleep. Likewise, some people report a massive improvement in sleep when they have removed any clock faces so if they wake in the night, the mind does not “panic” about the possible lack of sleep.

Sometimes, we will get into a “vicious cycle” of poor sleep that seems impossible to break- the diagram below may seem familiar:

If we have experienced poor sleep we might dread going to bed for fear of a repeat of the previous night. This may result in focusing so hard on various sleep strategies that the anxiety prevents us dropping off and results in further poor sleep. And so the cycle is created……

Initial poor sleep

More poor sleep

Negative thoughts (“Im going to feel awful”)

Trying to combat poor sleep

Loss of association tween Anxiety and worry

bed and sleep (causes fight/flight response about not sleeping =muscle tension = adrenaline)

More poor sleep

To further support the three controllers, it is recommended to create a strong association between bed and sleep, if possible reducing the use of the bedroom for any other activities.

Common aids to good sleep:

*Going to bed same time every night*  Bedroom kept for sleep/calm activities

A regular bedtime routine *Ensuring relaxing before bed time*

*No screens at least 1 hr before bed* Avoid heavy meals close to bed time/hungry

Low lighting Reduce noise/stimulation

Avoid stimulants – caffeine, nicotine, drugs (take 6 hrs to leave body)

Lavender – pillow spray/essential oil *Ear plugs/mask*

*Mediation/sleep app*  *Remove clocks from sight*

No exercise in the two hours before bed

Foods that contain tryptophan (milk, kiwis, chicken, eggs, cheese, fish, pumpkin and sesame seeds)

Further information and useful links and websites:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/children-and-sleep>

Sleep recommendations by National Autistic Society

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/physical-health/sleep>

assets.bupa.co.uk/~/media/images/healthmanagement/pdfs/six-steps-sleep.pdf