

Bedtimes Routines

When children have not had enough sleep, their behaviour is often more challenging. They may struggle to regulate their emotions and they may find it difficult to get through the day, as they lack the energy to do all that is asked of them. This makes parenting even more stressful and exhausting, resulting in us not having the patience when we most need it. The problem is, tired children don't act tired, they can actually become more active as they 'wind up', resisting bedtime and becoming more lively as the evening goes on. This is all because they are overtired.

Children need differing amounts of sleep depending on their age. Whilst there is no hard and fast rule, the general guidelines below, given by the NHS and The Sleep Council are helpful:

3 to 4 years - around 11 hours 30 mins

4 to 5 years - around 11 hours

5 to 7 years - around 10 hours 30 mins

7 to 9 years - around 10 hours

9 to 12 years - around 9 hours

So, how do we make sure that our child is getting the sleep they need? Work backwards from when they need to be up

in the morning and establish a set bedtime. For example, if they need to be up at 7am, a child aged 6 would need to be going to sleep no later than 8.30pm. Set their bedtime at least half an hour before this, depending on how quickly your child gets ready for bed and settles down to sleep. Most children need around half an hour to get ready for bed and settle down, with many needing longer but it shouldn't take any more than an hour. Once you have decided on a bedtime, make sure your child knows when this is and follow a simple routine each night so your child knows what is expected.

Example of a Bedtime Routine

It is advisable to give your child a 5 minute warning before bedtime so it doesn't come as a surprise to them. Bedtime should be a calm time after eating dinner and taking a bath or shower.

- Brush teeth and last time for toilet.
- Get straight into bed.
- Read story together with young children (older children to read alone and then turn own light out).
- Tuck your child in and say goodnight.
- Turn light out and leave the bedroom, (leaving night light on if your child needs one).

If your child then gets up after following this routine, just return them to bed and tell them it is time to sleep. Be

prepared to stick to this, even if they repeatedly get out of bed asking for different things.

It is advisable that all electronic gaming devices are off at least an hour before you want your child to be asleep. This may be harder said than done but worth it as your child's brain needs time to relax from gaming (and for older children social media and You Tube). Do not allow devices in bedrooms at bedtime. Watching something on T.V. together is a good way of having some relaxing family time before bed.

If bedtimes are still problematic and you feel you have tried everything, there is support available. Some children may require a little more help getting the sleep they need, due to medical conditions or simply that they are not used to a bedtime routine and therefore need time to adapt. The main thing to remember is that it is essential that your child gets the right amount of sleep and that you can help them to get it. If you still feel you need help with bedtimes talk to Mrs McCaugherty who can discuss your particular difficulties with you and offer support.

