

# Sleep cards

# Bedtime routine

A bedtime routine is a set of activities that occur **every night** at the **same time** in the **same order**.

Having a good bedtime routine has been shown to help with: settling, sleep disturbances, sleeping alone difficulties, refusing to go to bed, and waking early. It should consist of activities the child finds relaxing.

An example of a bedtime routine is:

1. Turn off T.V. and other electronic devices and have a “calm down” time e.g. colouring, drawing, play-dough, playing with toys
2. Have a snack and drink (avoid caffeine)
3. Up to the bathroom for bath/wash, teeth and toilet
4. Bedroom for story/massage/music

**Consider:** Using visual schedules for your child to follow. Keep your voice calm, avoid confrontation and any bright lighting. The length of the routine will vary depending on your child, ideally it would take 30 minutes but in some cases can take up to an hour.

# Calming time

Sometimes children with brain conditions can be easily overstimulated. This means that bedtime activities should be planned and chosen based on what your child finds relaxing.

- ✦ Keep lights dim in the time leading up to bedtime, and use red based lights where possible as this will not affect melatonin (the sleep hormone) levels. Make sure curtains are closed.
- ✦ Use a fixed bedroom routine and once your child is in bed use additional relaxation techniques, such as stroking, massage, and relaxing music (depending on the child). This is to help your child relax and not to soothe them to sleep. Additional relaxation techniques should be at the beginning of the routine. You would not want your child to fall asleep at this stage.
- ✦ Other examples of things your child may find relaxing:
  - Quiet baths
  - Stories
  - Lullabies
  - The presence of small toys
  - Familiar blanket
  - A comfortable bed
  - Rhythmic, repetitive, low frequency movements
  - Soft music

# Moving bedtime forward (Chronotherapy)

Chronotherapy includes a range of techniques used to move the sleep patterns to a desired time. This technique has been shown to increase the average sleep time at night and decrease sleep disturbances.

You would use this technique if your child is **staying awake after 1 am**.

1. Chronotherapy involves carefully and consistently delaying your child's bedtime and wake up time each day whilst maintaining a regular schedule during waking hours.
2. This method works best with a structured bedtime routine and calm down time.
3. Move the bedtimes and wake times forward by three hours each time (please note, this means sleeping in the day during the process so school holidays are usually the best time to try).
4. Using bright light in the evening will help delay the body clock.

## Example:

- Day 1: Sleep 4 am – 12 midday,
- Day 2: Sleep 7 am – 3 pm,
- Day 3: Sleep 10 am – 6pm,
- Day 4: Sleep 1 pm – 9pm,
- Day 5: Sleep 4pm – 12 midnight,
- Day 6: Sleep 7pm – 3am,
- Days 7-13: Sleep 10pm – 6am,
- Days 14+: Sleep 11 pm – 7am.

# Moving bedtime backwards (Phase advancement)

You would use this technique if your child is having difficulty falling asleep at a desired time, but is settling before 1 am.

First decide on an appropriate bedtime and waking time based on your child's sleep needs (these are individual for the child and you may need to speak to a Sleep Practitioner to help with this). This is what you are aiming for.

1. If you need to make changes to get to these times, do so by 15 minutes each day (or at a slower pace if needed).
2. Using bright light in the morning can help advance the body clock

## Example:

- ✦ If your child is put to bed at 8pm, and doesn't sleep until 11pm, you would start by putting them to bed at 11pm (with a calm down routine before), and then gradually make these times earlier by 15 minutes each day, until you get to a more reasonable time. If your child is taking longer than 15/20 minutes to settle, you may want to keep the time consistent for a few days before moving the time again.

# Graduated extinction

Bedtime refusal behaviours are typically described as stalling, verbal protests, crying, clinging, refusing to go to bed, getting out of bed and attention-seeking behaviours.

Graduated extinction involves gradually increasing the time that your child is left for:

1. Agree a set amount of time e.g. 2 minutes that you will allow your child to cry for.
2. After the set time, go in and check on them but avoid too much interaction.
3. Leave the room and wait the set amount of time before checking again.
4. Repeat until your child goes to sleep.
5. The next day, increase the amount of time you wait before going in (e.g. 4 minutes) and repeat the process. Keep increasing the time each day until your child can settle more easily.

**Please note:** If your child is in any physical discomfort or emotional distress these would need to be addressed first. This method is not recommended for children under 6 months, and developmental stage may also need to be considered. Medical conditions such as seizures should also be taken into account before choosing this method.

You may also like to consider using an object of comfort as a suitable substitute for the parent/object during the withdrawal process.

# Gradual withdrawal/retreat

When a child settles with you in the room, they will often need you there to settle again when they wake during the night, causing sleep disturbances. Gradual withdrawal means gradually increasing the distance between you and your child at night.

1. The first night you would sit on a chair by the bed, and remain there until your child falls asleep.
2. Once your child is used to this stage (this could be a few days, weeks or months at a pace that suits you both), you would move the chair a bit further away, and sit there until your child falls asleep.
3. You would continue to do this until the chair is by the door, and then out of the room/ out of sight, and then back in your own room/downstairs.

**Variations:** If your child is used to having someone in the bed, the first step might be to lie/ sit on the bed and gradually withdraw contact. You could use a mattress to sleep on, and move away, instead of using a chair so you can sleep there while doing this technique. The gradual approach can be used for items as well, such as a bottle (gradually reducing the amount of milk or dilute the milk gradually).

You may also like to consider using an object of comfort as a suitable substitute for the parent/object during the withdrawal process.

# How to reduce daytime naps

If your child is in the pattern of napping in the day and has trouble falling asleep at bedtime and/or wakes frequently at night, it might be that they are getting too much sleep in the day.

- ✦ If your child is having a regular nap each day, don't cut this out straight away.
- ✦ Reduce the nap time by 5 minutes each time (e.g. each week) until the nap is cut out altogether.
- ✦ To reduce nap times you can either delay the start time or wake them a bit earlier (to suit meal time/nursery/school runs etc). Try to keep the nap times fairly consistent (e.g. don't let them nap in the morning one day, and then afternoon the next).
- ✦ If your child is in school make the school aware that you are using this process to reduce naps and ask them to follow it.
- ✦ Keep bedtimes and wake times the same so that consistency in overnight sleep times supports this process.

# Positive sleep associations

Positive associations involve developing a set bedtime routine characterised by quiet activities that your child enjoys, and also associates with sleep.

- ✦ Many children, and especially children with brain conditions, fall asleep with specific sleep associations, such as being rocked or fed, which may not readily be available during the night when they wake.
- ✦ Children experience brief awakenings at the end of each natural sleep cycle (see our Sleep Guide for more information on this), usually every 60-90 minutes. If they cannot get back to sleep they will search for these positive associations they have made at bedtime.
- ✦ It is recommended that these positive sleep associations do not involve you. Where possible, this may involve training your child to be independent with their sleep associations. For example, if your child listens to music to go to sleep, this may involve them either being able to turn the music on by themselves, or to have the music on all night at a low level so you don't need to go in during the night.

# Rewards

A reward system can be used to encourage good sleep practice with your child.

- ✦ Rewards, also known as positive reinforcement, can be used to encourage desired behaviours e.g. staying in their bed all night and not going into your bed.
- ✦ It is very important that you choose a reward that you know will motivate your child. If possible, ask your child what reward they would like to have or work towards having.
- ✦ Rewards can take many forms e.g. praise, sticker charts, pocket money, an outing, time on an electronic device, time with a favourite toy/object, time with a particular person.
- ✦ Once a reward has been achieved for positive behaviours, they shouldn't be taken away, even if your child displays unwanted behaviour afterwards. It is important the child knows that the reward was achieved and earned.
- ✦ Some children may need to earn their reward immediately, in which case you would need a reward that can be given first thing in the morning if they achieve the desired behaviour. If your child can wait, then you may be able to delay the reward until the weekend.
- ✦ Some children may get bored of the reward system so this might need to be changed to keep them motivated.

# Sleep environment

A good sleep environment can help your child to fall to sleep quicker and stay asleep during the night.

Consider the following:

- ✦ Keep the bedtime environment dark, or use a red based light/night light if your child is afraid of the dark. Black-out blinds can reduce light coming in from outside.
- ✦ Stimulus control (where the bed, bedroom and bedtime routine all signal sleep). Make sure the environment is one your child associates with bedtime. For example, keep toys to a minimum, or put them away at night time. Avoid electronic equipment such as T.V.s, tablets, phones and computers in the room.
- ✦ Bedding – your child should be comfortable and each child will have their own preferences (consider their sensory needs). Some children may like heavy blankets or sleeping bags, some may not like the feel of the bedding. It is important to make sure that your child is at a temperature that is comfortable for them.
- ✦ Consider noise levels – this can vary based on the individual. Some children may like music or white noise for sleep, and this can also help block out background noise.
- ✦ Avoid too many distractions in the room, such as posters on the wall. Consider using neutral colours.



# Working wonders for children with brain conditions

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