

Managing Bedtime & Autism: Establishing Bedtime routines

1. Bedroom environment:

- Comfortable – bed, duvet, (blanket if child needs to be tucked in), pillows, nightwear
- Quiet
- Dark - no light is better to support good sleep awareness.
- Low arousal (free from toys/objects)
- Correct temperature 16-18 degrees
- Calming not stimulating
- Blackout curtains

2. Routine:

- Plan quiet time
- Hand-eye co-ordination activities (colouring, puzzles, peg boards, tweezers, threading...)
- Calm bedtime routine and low lighting
- Once in bedroom not to return downstairs

3. Sleep Hygiene:

- **NB; No screens in the hour before bedtime**
- Avoid giving your child sugary drinks or biscuits
- Use sleepy foods – dairy (oats, warm milk), cold turkey, saltine as a supper routine and reduce amount of food at dinner time to compensate for additional meal/snack.
- Bath time – if too over-stimulating leave till morning (or use for cosy time)
- Use the same language (predictable sentences and phrases) each night. Create a bedtime song to sing together and stick to it – do not be persuaded to add to set routine.
- Differentiate between day and night
- Use music/ light/ smell to support understanding of time of day
- Use visual timetables to support bedtime routines (wigit symbols)
- Social stories – why it is important to sleep
- Keep language simple and positive. Stay calm, phone a friend, get your sleep in the day if you are also sleep deprived!
- **For more advice on sleep, bedtime routines and equipment contact:** <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/> * [Children with SEND - The Sleep Charity](#)
- **Workshop by Gina Davies (a must see!)** <https://youtu.be/lZt0z1NwyMs>
- **Useful leaflet and advice:** [Helping-your-child-sleep.pdf](#) (contact.org.uk)

An Example of a sleep routine:

Things to consider during the day: (diet, exercise, naps)

- Regular movement breaks (heavy grounding and/or energy emitting)
- Exercise (walk, run, cycle, climbing frame or circuits if space is limited)
- Jumping/trampoline/dancing or dance mat

Bedtime Routine:

- Dinner
- Fine motor/hand eye co-ordination activity.
- Bath (lavender scented calming bubbles)
- PJs/sleepsuit
- Massage (calming scented)
- Relaxing Music/ CD (to give sense of time before bed, not to fall asleep to)
- Bed

Sensory strategies:

- Weighted blanket (for no more than 30 mins)
- Reduced light or **no light at all!**
- Calming music before bed

Communication strategies:

- Social story explaining the importance of sleep
- Schedule for bedtime routine

- Gro-Clock (has stars for night time and sun for daytime) or similar sleep training alarm clock (preferably without blue light!).

Reinforcement:

- **Reward for staying in bed (first and then board) range of sticker charts/ morning celebrations/ morning play treat.**

Other strategies:

- Regular reviews of motivators (something that motivates child to go to bed) as they change
- Sleepy foods – oats/dairy
- Blank schedules (visual routines during sleep time are blank boxes to reinforce that we all need sleep to ‘power down’ and we do not get up or go downstairs to play or this will disturb our bodies recharging).
- Hand eye co-ordination activities
- White noise
- Timer for waking up.
- Clear bedroom of any toys other than preferred comforter 😊