

Sleep support for SEND parents

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Whole School Approach



Challenges, Strategies and Insights



Why do ND children and young people struggle to sleep?



- Sensory differences and blue light sensitivities
- Difficulties winding down
- Increased anxiety or inability to relax
- Food sensitivity and allergies

The role of sleep hygiene in supporting better rest

- A regular routine before bed
- Dark, quiet, cool bedroom
- No screens
- Consistent bedtime
- Falling asleep alone
- Daytime exercise
- Calming down in the hours before bedtime such as reading a book, listening to music or using a weighted blanket
- Avoiding daytime naps for school aged children.

Make the bedroom more comfortable

- block out light
- reduce noise
- Let your child use ear plugs or listen to music through headphones
- remove labels from bedding and night clothes
- reduce smells coming into the room
- remove distractions
- use relaxation techniques

Research insights: what influences sleep in autism?

Daytime

- Exercise activities that young people enjoy in a way that works for them
- A chance to make choices – taking time to choose what they want to do and being involved in daily decision making
- Time spent dedicated to special interests

Nighttime

- Considering sensory needs - are there sights, sounds, smells, environments, foods or tactile things they like to feel that help young people feel relaxed and ready for bed? For example, a cool room, a blue light, a bath, soft pyjamas.

More insights.....

- Rehearsing what will happen tomorrow with parent/carer before bed as they can ask “them about things and giving me specific answers back” which was described as “like a game or like lyrics to a song.”
- Having the opportunity to explore a favourite activity before nighttime as a young person said, “playing with Lego, reaching a point of effortless satisfaction.”
- Knowing the outcome of completed homework as “To know = worry less, not having to stay up worrying”
- Playing a table game with a clear set of rules and instructions as one young person stated that “card games is fun, I know the rules, what can go wrong.”

Getting some sleep yourself

- Safety proof your child's room
- Find out more about [community care](#) and respite services.
- Seek support outside the family such as your GP, social worker or your child's school, for help and advice.

Further useful resources and websites

- [National Sleep Foundation: Children and Sleep](#)
- [National Sleep Foundation: Teenagers and Sleep](#)
- [The National Autistic Society: Sleep and Autism](#)
- [Kent Emotional Wellbeing Team and Medway Emotional Support Team](#)
- [A Good Night's Sleep: Learning About Sleep From Autistic Adolescents' Personal Accounts \(Pavopoulou et al 2021\)](#)
- [Research: Sleep Disturbances and Autism \(Carmassi et al, 2019\)](#)



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