



Many children have difficulties settling and sleeping throughout the night. A lack of sleep can have a huge impact on the child themselves, as well as the family as a whole.

The following lists potential factors to be considered, as well as suggesting strategies that could be implemented to help your child get a better night's sleep.

Room Temperature

Is your child getting too hot or too cold? Having a thermometer hanging in your child's room can help you to keep an eye on the temperature of the room. Ideally the temperature should remain between 16 and 20°C. If your child has movement difficulties, they may find it difficult to regulate their own body temperature.

Light

Is the room too dark or too light for your child? It may help to use a night light or black-out curtains. Try lying on their bed to see light and shadows from your child's point of view.

Background noise

Are there any noises inside or outside the home that could be distracting for your child? Some children may find it difficult to block out background noise, which could keep their attention heightened throughout the night. Children with sensory issues can be particularly sensitive to noise; what may seem like a quiet sound to you could be particularly distressing for them.

Distractions

Try to limit the amount of toys and electronics kept in your child's room. If interesting things are still in both eye and earshot, this can suggest the bedroom is an environment for playing rather than sleeping. Allocating time for a tidy-up routine before bedtime can help move the focus from play to sleep.

Lack of routine

Have you implemented a good bedtime routine for your child? Has this been disrupted because of an event such as the school holidays? Visual aids are a great way to support their bedtime routine, helping them to understand the order of events and what's going to happen next. The unknown can cause anxiety, which can lead to disruption of sleep. By having a clear process, you can minimise any stresses or worries your child may have.

Pain

Is your child experiencing any pain? Children with communication difficulties may find it hard to express how they are feeling. Lack of sleep in children with movement difficulties can be in response to pain, as they may be struggling to reposition themselves and get comfortable. Have you received advice regarding night time positioning systems from your Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist? (Please refer to Postural Care SNAP Information Sheet for more details).



Comfort

Is their bed comfortable? Do they feel secure? If your child struggles with sensory issues, are they being tucked in tightly enough? Many children will feel lost in their bed. By tucking blankets and soft toys around them this can help them to feel supported enough to be comfortable falling asleep in bed on their own.

Sensory Needs

Children with sensory issues may find it hard to settle. Strategies to try using include looking at different types of nightwear. Try tight or loose pyjamas, to identify which type your child prefers. If your child likes pressure and you often find their covers are falling off during the night, try using a sleeping bag as an alternative. It may be worth avoiding pyjamas that have built in feet, as this may cause irritation to a child with tactile defences. Back rubs and bear hugs before bedtime can help children feel more settled.

Other considerations

If you have thought about and implemented some of these strategies and feel you have a good bedtime routine for your child but they still have difficulty falling or staying asleep, do contact your health visitor, paediatrician or GP for advice. There may be some further help available via the health services.

There are several books and resources available in the SNAP library relating to sleep that you may wish to explore.