

Sleep Hygiene: The Facts

Sleep plays a crucial role in the development of children's minds and is essential for their mental and physical health. Sleep allows a child's mind to digest and make sense of the day's events. It prepares their brain for learning new things the next day. Simply put, getting the proper amount of sleep helps them to cope better with whatever life brings their way. A child who consistently gets a good night's sleep is more likely to be mentally alert, have more energy during the day, and reach their full potential.

How much sleep does a child need?

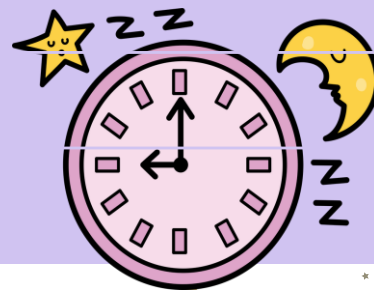
The amount of sleep a child might need depends on their age. It is normal for a child to take 20-30 minutes to get to sleep, so bedtime should be half an hour before the ideal sleep time. A good sleep routine should start an hour before bedtime. Listed below are some recommended bedtimes, as advised by the Sleep Foundation (2024).

Age	Recommended hours of sleep
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3-5 years	10-13 hours (including naps)
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6-12 years	9-12 hours
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13-18 years	8-10 hours
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What helps support a good bedtime routine?

A good bedtime routine can look different in many households; it is important to consider the differing needs of your child or children. We appreciate that there is not always a one-way works for all, however, several things are widely recognised as helpful in most circumstances.

1) Consistency and structure

A routine that follows the same pattern supports younger children to predict what is coming next. Collaborating with your child on activities that support sleep will help them to feel involved.

2) A sleep-focused bedroom environment

A dark, quiet, tidy bedroom is ideal for feeling safe and comfortable at bedtime. Room dividers or curtains may help to reduce distractions if your child shares a bedroom. Removing distractions such as mobile phones or televisions will support the brain's adjustment to sleep.

3) Nutrition and exercise

Certain foods can encourage sleep, such as bananas, porridge, and cherries. It is highly recommended to avoid sugary or caffeinated foods or drinks at bedtime to support the transition to sleep. Exercising during the daytime often helps sleep but try not to implement this just before bedtime.

Sleep Hygiene: Frequently Asked Questions

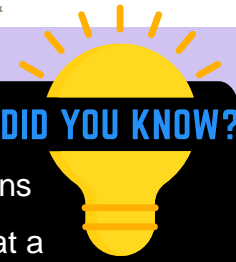
“At bedtime my child often wants to discuss their worries, what can I do?”

One thing we usually suggest is delaying speaking about the worry until the following morning. This is known as ‘worry time’, an agreed specific time in the day for your child to share their concerns. Children often feel reassured that they will have a specific time to talk about their worry with their trusted adult. When morning comes, children often find that they are no longer worrying about that problem.

“How do I get my child to sleep before midnight?”

During puberty, children start to secrete melatonin later at night than they did in earlier childhood. This affects their circadian rhythm. It means that your child may want to go to bed later at night and get up later in the morning.

- Encouraging your child to go to bed and get up around the same time every day, even on the weekend, can help your child’s internal body clock get into a rhythm.
- Where possible, allow plenty of time – for example, an hour – for your child to wind down before lights out. Quiet activities like reading a book or magazine, drawing, or writing might be helpful for your child as they begin to unwind from the day.



Did you know that animals sleep in different ways? For example, some animals like dolphins and whales sleep with only half of their brain at a time, while the other half stays awake to help them swim and breathe. **DID YOU KNOW?**

Sleep is an important biological function that supports the brain’s daily growth and development. It can be affected by so many factors, but there are lots of things we can do to try and support children and young people with their sleep.

We hope that some of the information contained here is useful to you. Should you need anything further we have included some useful links to national sleep charities below:

The Sleep Charity– www.thesleepcharity.org.uk

Offering support and guidance to children and adults to support better sleep.

Teen Sleep Hub – www.teensleephub.org.uk

Supporting the sleep needs of teens and young people.

Cerebra – www.cerebra.org.uk

A charity supporting the additional sleep needs of children with a brain related condition.