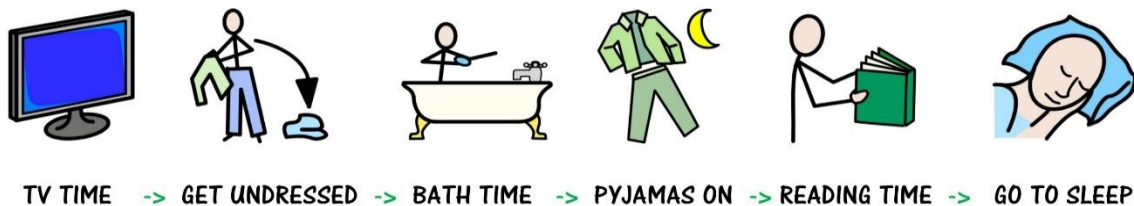


Promoting a Positive Sleep Routine

Sleep is very important for children's development and well rested children are best able to reach their full potential. Everybody can benefit from having a good sleep routine – even grown-ups! A good sleep routine needs to be planned well in advance. Consistency and firmness are also key.

First you need to consider what time bedtime will be and then work backwards, planning the hour leading up to it in some detail. If your child isn't settling until late you may need to gradually move their bedtime routine forward over a number of weeks.



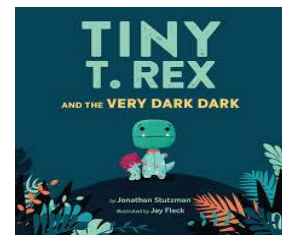
Here are some tips for establishing a positive bedtime routine:

- * Make sure bedtime is realistic, if your child isn't falling asleep until 11pm there is no point starting a routine at 6pm
- * Turn all screens off in the hour before bedtime as this prevents melatonin (sleep hormone) being produced. Dim the lights, close the curtains and create some darkness to help to promote the melatonin production
- * Offer quiet activities that are motivating to your child. Fine motor skill activities are perfect to aid relaxation e.g. jigsaws, colouring in, threading, building with bricks.
- * Diet is important and what is consumed during the day can impact on sleep. It is best to avoid anything such as biscuits and cakes in the evening
- * Baths are great if your child finds them relaxing. If however they are fearful of them or get overexcited they may not help in the bedtime routine. Ideally a bath should take place 30 minutes before bedtime as this aids relaxation by increasing the body temperature. It is the slow decrease in body temperature that helps us to feel more relaxed and fall asleep

- * Get ready for bed in the same order - for example, bath, pyjamas on, tooth brushing, toilet.
- * Try to finish up the evening routine activities downstairs to prevent your child coming back downstairs after their bath if this is a transition difficulty for your child.
- * Once in bed spend some time reading a bedtime story with your child- state what will happen after the story eg. “First story, then hug and kiss”
- * Give hugs and kisses and tell your child ‘it’s night time, time for sleep’
- * Wake them up at the same time each morning to help to strengthen their body clock

* **Fear/Anxiety**

Some children may genuinely be fearful of the dark. Child friendly stories normalising this fear can be helpful and there are lots of lovely ones available online.



Children may also want a parent with them during the night. Some children take comfort from having a parent’s T-shirt over their pillowcase so that they have their familiar scent close by. Settling aside specific “worry time” to talk about your child’s worries before bedtime can help with the bedtime routine.



Some children benefit from the use of a ‘Gro clock’- this provides a nice visual countdown of showing your child how long they have until they can get out of bed.

Where fear or anxiety is severe it may be necessary to seek advice from your GP to see if more specialist support is required.

* **Changes in Routine**

When routine is changed it can impact on sleep. Be mindful sometimes changes to family dynamics or situations can impact on a child’s sleep habits. Sticking to routine as much as possible is helpful and will ensure your child feels secure.

Lots of children benefit from seeing what will happen in their daily routine, sometimes this can prevent a bedtime battle as the visuals don't talk back and remain consistent! Visuals can help reduce children's anxieties around bedtime and make things more predictable. Here are some visuals to use to help create your own routine:



A bedtime routine is extremely important to support your child in relaxing. Bedtime routines need some thought and forward planning, being consistent is essential. It takes children time to learn a new behaviour including during the night. Follow through any changes you make for at least two weeks to begin to see any improvement.

Considering what may be causing a sleep issue helps you identify the most appropriate strategy to address it. It may help to discuss these with an appropriate professional such as a health visitor, school nurse or GP.