

Developed by the NCSE Occupational Therapy Team



The focus of the occupational therapy series is on everyday home occupations that support children and young people's learning, development and wellbeing. By encouraging your child/young person to participate with you in these activities, opportunities for learning can occur as there is great learning potential to be found in everyday occupations.

Sleep is an important activity of daily living (Tester & Foss, 2018). It is essential for the brain and body. It is important for learning, memory and regulation. Sleep problems impact on children and young people's daily occupations such as concentration, attention, social performance and wellbeing (Meltzer, 2016). Sleep can impact on every aspect of family life.

During the Covid-19 restrictions, routines have been disrupted which can result in increased levels of anxiety and stress in the home. Returning to school means another change in a child or young person's routine. This can have a negative impact on your family's sleep routine. Below are some strategies to try to support sleep in your home.

- 1 Establish a daily routine:** Routines provide reassuring structure and purpose.
 - Try to have set bedtimes and wake times every day, even on the weekends. Schedule sleep by setting alarms for bed time and morning routines.
 - Encourage a mix of learning, creative, physical and relaxation time in the day.
 - Help your child/young person make a visual timetable so everyone knows the routine.
 - Switch off iPads and phones at least an hour before bedtime. They are very stimulating and can hinder a good night's sleep.
 - Avoid sugar and caffeine before bed.
- 2 Bedroom and Bed:** A calm relaxing bedroom and comfortable bed is the foundation to a good night's sleep. Here are some ideas:
 - Make sure your child/young person's bed is comfortable and screen free.
 - Try to ensure the bedroom is the right temperature, quiet and relaxed.
 - Reading, having a hot bath and listening to soft music before bed can promote relaxation and encourage sleep.
 - Ensure your child/young person sleeps on a comfortable mattress and pillows.
 - Black out curtains in your child's/young person's room can support sleep especially in the bright summer months.
- 3 Avoid too much media exposure during the day:** Too much media and discussion of Covid-19 could increase your child/young person's worries. Offer them time to come and discuss worries and reassure them that this will pass. Using [social stories](#) helps children and young people understand what is going on. It is important to be mindful of how we manage stress and model positive coping strategies to children and young people.

- 4 Exercise daily:** Encourage your child/young person to exercise and play outside, this uses up energy gradually and helps them sleep better. If you cannot go outside, making an indoor obstacle course or tune into many fitness videos online can be fun.

Avoid doing heavy exercise one or two hours before bed as this may be stimulating. Yoga is an activity parents and children/young people can do together in the evening to prepare for sleep which is generally calming and can help promote sleep.

There is more information about regulating your [child's](#) and [teen's](#) energy levels on the NCSE website.

5 Plan relaxing, sensory activities as part of the bedtime routine could include:

- Relaxation activities may include having a warm bath, listening to gentle relaxing music, getting a hand or foot message, using calming dim lighting or having a warm drink or glass of milk
- A light healthy snack such as a banana and a glass of milk.
- Fine motor skill activities such as jigsaws and colouring.
- Breathing activities such as encouraging your child/young person to concentrate on their breathing and imagine inhaling a beautiful white light and blowing out any worries or troubles each time they exhale.
- Reading stories before bed is a nice way to end the day and supports language development.

- 6 Look after yourself:** Being a full-time parent or carer with household duties and work is challenging. Make sure you eat and sleep well, and include time for your own rest, self-care and leisure in your daily routine. More information related to looking after your mental wellbeing can be found [here](#).

Healthy Routines

Teaching you child/young person to sleep by themselves can build **confidence** and help develop **healthy habits, routines and independent living**.

Concentration and Attention

Good sleep can increase concentration, attention and memory recall, all of which are essential for learning.

Relaxation and the Senses

Your child/young person can learn calming sensory strategies to relax before bed. This can increase coping skills and their ability to self-regulate.

References

Meltzer, L. J. (2016). Sleep and developmental psychopathology: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 46(2), 171–174.

National sleep foundation website <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

Tester, N. J., & Foss, J. J. (2018). Sleep as an occupational need. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 72(1), 1–4.

The children's sleep charity <https://www.thechildrensleepcharity.org.uk/news.php>