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NELFT provides community and mental health services for people of all ages in Essex and the London boroughs of Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, as well as Kent and Medway.

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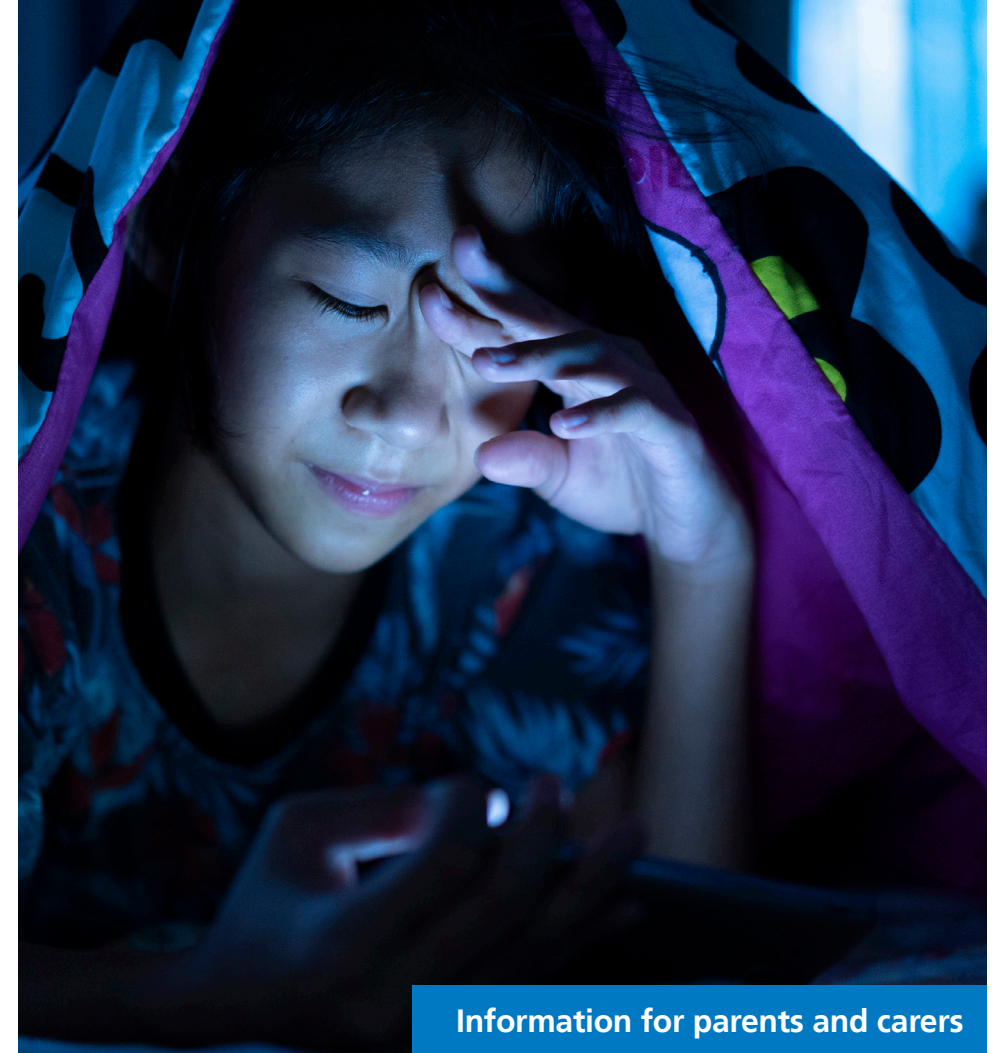
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Sleep hygiene

Going to bed, falling asleep, and staying asleep



Information for parents and carers





Sleep difficulties are very common in children and young people, and usually relate to problems with going to sleep and staying asleep.

This resource covers:

- Why some children and young people have sleep problems.
- What helps with getting to sleep.
- Night waking and what helps with staying asleep.
- Some additional resources to support you and your child/young person.

Why do some young people have sleep difficulties?

Sometimes sleep difficulties can arise because of stress, anxiety and worries about things like school and exams, friendship groups, and sudden changes in normal day to day lives. Overthinking these things can make it worse.

Sleep difficulties are also made worse by bad habits. Sleeping too much during the day and not having a consistent routine, e.g. going to sleep and waking up at different times each day, will put your natural body clock out of sync and make it harder to sleep well.

Really importantly, too much time in front of screens before 'bedtime' (TV, computers, phones, tablets) can affect our melatonin levels. Melatonin is a natural sleep hormone that our brains release to tell our bodies that it's time to sleep. Melatonin is released after the sun has set (when it starts to get dark). When we're using our screens (which produce a lot of light), it affects our natural sleep hormone, making it harder for us to feel sleepy at night. When we've lost that 'sleepy' feeling at night, it will usually take about an hour for our brains to release the next surge of melatonin. If young people continue to use their screens throughout the night, this will make sleep very difficult.



What will help?

Sleep hygiene is a combination of habits and practices that improve quality of sleep. Sometimes melatonin hormones can be taken to encourage a good sleep pattern, but these are only helpful for getting the body ready for sleep. So, even if we take melatonin supplements but sleep hygiene is poor, they are unlikely to help. Research shows that melatonin does not actually do much as a sleep aid, and only produces a small reduction in the time taken to fall asleep. They are also not recommended to be used longer-term.

Find more on: www.sleepstation.org.uk/

Here are some tips for making sure your child/young person has good sleep hygiene:

- **Limit screen time before bedtime:** restrict bright lights at least an hour before bedtime, and use the night mode option on electronic devices to reduce blue light from screens (blue light depletes our natural melatonin levels). This will help natural melatonin levels to rise.
- **Routine:** set a consistent bedtime routine, and have a wind down period before bed, e.g. reading or taking a warm bath. A visual timetable can help organise bedtime routines and serve as a reminder for children and young people. Try to also support your child/young person to keep to a regular sleep pattern during the week and on weekends. This creates a sleep habit in the brain and makes the 'sleepy' feeling.
- **Daytime napping:** cut out (or reduce) daytime napping so they're more tired during the evening, and more likely to fall asleep at a reasonable time. Daytime napping affects the body's natural circadian rhythm (our internal sleep cycle).

- **Caffeine:** drink fewer caffeinated drinks during the day (coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks), and avoid them in the evening in particular (at least four hours before bedtime). Try something more relaxing – warm milk, or a herbal tea.
- **Exercise:** try to encourage some fresh air and exercise during the day; this might be a simple walk or some more intense exercise that will help children and young people feel more tired in the evenings. However, try to avoid intense exercise at least two hours before bed, as this will peak their energy levels (making falling asleep much harder).
- **Diet:** avoid large meals immediately before bedtime, though a small snack might be helpful.
- **Environment:** close curtains during the night to block out any early morning light which might wake them up. Try to create a peaceful and restful sleeping environment, controlling noise, temperature and light (where possible). Make sure the bed (pillows, duvet etc.) is comfortable.
- **Noise:** if you have a noisy household, using ear plugs and ear defenders can be helpful to block out extra noise and distractions.
- **Morning routine:** use bright lights in the morning (e.g. Lumie) which might help waking up. The idea is to wake up early enough so they feel tired in the evening to sleep earlier. Having a good morning routine set up will help with this - you might consider making a morning hygiene timetable to help your child/young person start their morning.



If children and young people are experiencing anxieties and worries around bedtime, here are some things that might help:

- Use essential oils (like lavender or bergamot) to relax and calm.
- Use positive self-talk and meditation techniques.
- Create a worry box for repeated anxious questions or thoughts. Writing a 'to do list' might help if they're worrying about the next day, which can help to organise thoughts and clear the mind of distractions.
- Take a relaxing warm bath or shower before bed.
- Some gentle yoga stretches will help to relax muscles and tension.
- Time with a family member as part of their bedtime routine may be comforting.
- Read a book, or taking part in another distraction exercise like colouring and creating, that will allow the mind to 'switch off'.



What is it and what can help?

When a child or young person wakes up repeatedly during the night, it's often caused by poor 'sleep onset associations'. A 'sleep association' is what a child learns to need to fall asleep at bedtime e.g. having a parent nearby while they fall asleep, or having the light on.. Unfortunately, when a child wakes up during the night and notices this thing is no longer there, their sleep will become disrupted as they try to find that thing to go back to sleep; they may cry and shout for parents, or go into their parents' bedroom. Contrastingly, a child or young person who is able to 'self-sooth' will usually be able to go back to sleep quickly and without help.

Here are some things that can help with night waking and staying asleep:

- Address the bedtime problems first and encourage good sleep hygiene - address anything around sleep hygiene that need to be altered.
- Strengthen 'sleep onset associations' with other things e.g. essential oils, transitional objects, or music on continuous play. You want to shift the child or young person's dependence away from what they normally use and rely on to fall back asleep.
- Think about reducing engagement and quickly encourage the child or young person to return to bed.
- Manage boundaries around getting up/leaving their room.
- Remind them to use their strategies to get back to sleep without you there. Remember their initial response might be to turn to their electronic devices. Encourage alternative self-soothing strategies that mean they won't rely on their electronic device (or you).
- Using rewards might be helpful to encourage positive changes. Think about splitting this up so they can break the goal into manageable steps you can reward without disheartening them.



DAILY SLEEP DIARY

Complete the diary each morning (Day 1 will be your first morning).
Don't worry too much about giving exact answers, an estimate will do.

Name: Date of Day 1:

Enter the weekday (Mon, Tues, etc.)	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
What time did you go to bed last night?							
After settling down, how long did it take you to fall asleep?							
After falling asleep, how many times did you wake up in the night?							
After falling asleep, for how long were you awake during the night in total?							
What time did you finally wake up?							
What time did you get up?							
How long did you spend in bed last night (from first getting in, to finally getting up?)							
How would you rate the quality of your sleep last night? 😞 1 2 3 4 5 😊 V.Poor V.Good							

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on children and young people's sleep difficulties and advice on how to support them, please visit NELFT's YouTube channel for a presentation on sleep from our Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Dr Rachel Hussey:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEyrB3IKjSk>

Please visit the NHS and Sleep Foundation websites for more information, articles, and tips:

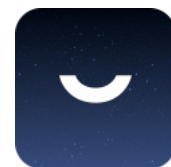
<https://www.sleepfoundation.org>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/>

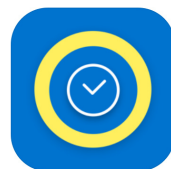
Useful relaxation Apps:



Stop, Breathe & Think Kids is a mindful games App designed for children ages 5 - 10. Kids can check into how they are feeling using fun emojis and try recommended mindful missions and meditations. Stickers reward their progress.



Pzizz is a free NHS approved App with in-built app purchases that helps calm your mind, fall asleep fast, and stay asleep. It uses a mix of voice overs, music and sounds, and the latest clinical research. It is useful for teenagers.



ReachOut WorryTime is a free App that helps you control everyday stress and anxiety by acting as a place to store your daily worries. You can set a worry time that suits your schedule and, when WorryTime sends you an alert, it's time to think about what's been stressing you out. At other times tell your brain to forget it. Suitable for ages 12 and above.



TOP TIPS FOR GREAT SLEEP

You can print out this poster to display in your home and go through whenever you need to with your child or young person.

