

Sleep advice for parents and carers

It is quite common for young children to struggle to settle down to sleep at night and stay asleep. Young children need between 11 and 12 hours sleep per night. Less than this can result in a tired child and may affect their mood and behaviour the next day. Sleep problems in children can also be challenging for parents and carers who need their rest too.

Common causes of sleep problems include:

- Night-time fears, like the dark
- Overstimulation (from screens or television)
- The need for a comforter, such as a bottle of milk or dummy
 - Nightmares and night terrors
 - Sleep Apnoea
 - Anxiety

If your child refuses to go to bed

- Decide what time you want your child to go to bed.
- Start a "winding down" bedtime routine around 30 minutes before the time that your child usually falls asleep. Bring this forward by 5 to 10 minutes each week – or 15 minutes if your child is in the habit of going to bed late – until you get to the bedtime you want. Read more about [helping babies to sleep](#).
- Set a limit on how much time you spend with your child when you put them to bed. For example, read only one story, then tuck your child in and say goodnight.
- Give your child their favourite toy, dummy (if they use one) or comforter before settling into bed.
- Leave a dim light on if necessary.
- If your child gets up, keep taking them back to bed again with as little fuss as possible.
- Try to be consistent and use a firm, positive approach
- You may have to repeat this routine for several nights.

If your child struggles to fall asleep or wakes in the night.

- Make sure you have a calming, predictable bedtime routine that happens at the same time and includes the same things every night.
- If your child complains that they are hungry at night, try giving them a bowl of cereal and milk before bed (make sure you brush their teeth afterwards).
- If your child is afraid of the dark, consider using a nightlight or leaving a landing light on.
- Do not let your child look at laptops, tablets, television or phones in the 30 to 60 minutes before bed – the light from screens can interfere with sleep.
- If your child wakes up during the night, be as boring as possible to avoid exciting them and leave lights off.
- Avoid long naps in the afternoon.
- Make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature, being too hot or cold can affect sleep.
- Too much bright light can affect sleep, a black out blind a darker room may be helpful.



Other ideas

Diet – Some foods promote the production of serotonin that helps us to sleep. You could try wholegrain bread, bananas, turkey, rice, nuts, milk, oats, peanut butter, honey, celery, cherry juice or chamomile tea in the evenings

Consider keeping a sleep diary may be useful to look for patterns and reasons that a child is struggling to sleep. Make a note nap times, getting to sleep, waking up, what the child did that day, what you did.



Further support and advice

Talk to your health visitor or GP if you need further advice.

Sometimes children with long-term illnesses or disabilities find it more difficult to sleep through the night. This can be challenging both for them and for you.

The charity [Contact](#) has more information about [helping you and your child sleep](#).

[Scope](#) also has [sleep advice for parents of disabled children](#).

Condition specific organisations may be able to offer advice, such as:
National autistic society, downs syndrome association, Mencap

The Sleep Charity offers advice and support online [Information & Support - The Sleep Charity](#)