

# Sleep Toolkit for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Guidance and support aimed at parents and carers, and those working with families with special educational needs and disabilities



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# Sleep Guidance for children with SEND



Sleep is the same as any other skill that has to be learnt. It needs to be based on repetition, clear routines and patience. Therefore, if your child faces additional barriers to learning and development, then they may need extra help to learn the routines around sleep. This is likely to involve small steps over time and acknowledgment that this can be a challenge- especially if you are sleep deprived yourself. The most important messages are still those given in the South Gloucestershire Sleep Toolkits; **Early Years** – [Birth to five years](#) **Childhood** – [Five to 13 years](#) **Adolescence** – [13 to 18 year olds](#) In this SEND toolkit, we will address some additional questions about sleep that are often raised. These are broken down into different areas of need and we hope will help you problem-solve with your family or alongside any professionals involved. There are likely to be extra worries and anxieties that come with having a child with additional needs, especially about leaving children alone during the night. As we all naturally wake up several times a night, if your child is unable to fall asleep alone then each time they wake (mostly likely every 90 mins), they will look for you. They may therefore find it difficult to fall back to sleep without your help. Supporting your child fall to sleep alone will help them do this in the night during natural night-waking. The introduction page in each age-specific sleep toolkit (see above links) provides further information about sleep cycles. It is important to also be aware of the larger impact that certain events can have on the sleep of children with additional needs (e.g.- Christmas, holidays, the clocks changing).

# Language and social understanding

<p style="text-align: center;">Language</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Social Understanding</p> 
<p>Children with language difficulties may have issues understanding the routines around bedtime and communicating to you how they are feeling:</p>	<p>Your child might not pick up on social cues that lead to bedtime. They may not understand what needs to happen so will need to know more about why and when they need to sleep.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you use repetitive phrases at bedtime? E.g. "It's bedtime now, its time to sleep"</li> <li>• Do you use visuals to show a clear routine before bed?</li> <li>• For younger children, do you use a bedtime song to reduce the language barriers?</li> <li>• Do you carry out the routine only in the bedroom and bathroom to keep this clear and consistent?</li> <li>• Are you aware of Makaton signs related to sleep?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your child have positive sleep associations that are separate from you?</li> <li>• Do you use visuals to show a clear routine before bed?</li> <li>• Could you read books that explain sleep or write a Social Story?</li> <li>• Could you use the same story every night?</li> <li>• Does your child use an object that signals when it is the morning?</li> <li>• Would your child like a reward chart around sleep?</li> </ul>



Additional information and advice on sleep and some useful links can be found in the "[Further information and where to get help](#)" section of this toolkit. *Illustrations: Freepik.com*

# Sensory Processing and Emotional Regulation

<p style="text-align: center;">Sensory Processing</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Emotional Regulation</p> 
<p>Sensory issues may mean a child is over or under-stimulated at night time. Adjusting the environment to help regulate this will be important:</p>	<p>Some children can be anxious or emotionally overwhelmed. These children need a calm bedtime routine which reassures them and helps them 'love their room' and hold you in mind.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If your child finds bathtime overstimulating, could this be earlier in the evening?</li> <li>• Do you use massage as a way to calm at bedtime?</li> <li>• Have you tried using a red light for a night light?</li> <li>• Have you tried introducing a scent to the bedroom?</li> <li>• Have you tried black-out blinds in the bedroom?</li> <li>• Does the child have access to calming music?</li> <li>• Do you tuck the duvet in tightly to the bed?</li> <li>• Is the bedroom a comfortable temperature, between 16-18 C?</li> <li>• Are the bedroom walls calm colours?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your child associate bed time with play time?</li> <li>• If your child spends much time in the bedroom not sleeping, could bedtime be later to combat this?</li> <li>• Do you keep 'wake times' consistent (e.g.- 7am every day)?</li> <li>• Have you tried a visual 'bedtime pass' that the child can use during night-waking?</li> <li>• Does your child do physical activity after-school? Does this end 2-3 hours before bed time?</li> <li>• Does your child have a transitional object (e.g.- teddy/ muslin) for bed time?</li> </ul>

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# Health and parent resilience

 <p>Health</p>	 <p>Parent resilience</p>
<p>Health issues in children can disrupt the routine of bedtime because of night-feeds, continence issues or discomfort. Sleep apnoea can be a side-effect of some conditions and lead to increased night-waking.</p>	<p>Sleep disturbance can effect the whole family and it is therefore important that parents feel supported to develop the most healthy routines for everyone.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you aware of foods that promote sleep and can the child have these during a 'supper' time?</li> <li>• Do you keep a sleep diary for your child's routine and symptoms?</li> <li>• Are relevant professionals aware of sleep issues?</li> <li>• Is your child taking medication that may cause sleep-related side effects?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you and your partner take it in turns to respond in the night?</li> <li>• Do you and your partner agree on the importance of the routine and consistency?</li> <li>• Do you avoid using the bedroom as a consequence for bad behaviour?</li> <li>• If your child moves between two homes, do you keep the routine and environment as consistent as possible?</li> <li>• At weekends, do you keep bed/wake times no more than an hour different to weeknights?</li> </ul>

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# Resources

## Better Sleep and Motivator Cards

Visual aids to act as a reward or prompt to check in with physical/emotional needs.

[www.plantlovegrow.com](http://www.plantlovegrow.com)

## HeadSpace App or SAM App



Apps for guided meditation and managing anxiety.

## MP3 Pillow

Pillow that connects to a music source (e.g. iPod). Safer than wearing headphone. Suitable for



5+yrs.

## Bed-time Pass

Visual aid which can be used to request something during the night. If unused, it can be traded for a reward in the morning. [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

## Visual Sleep/Wake Clocks

Use images of the stars and sun to communicate when to go back to sleep and when it's time to



get out of bed.

## Sleep Sacs



## Calming music/sounds

Sounds such as waves, rain and white noise can be calming. These can be searched online or bought on CD.

- [www.rainymood.com](http://www.rainymood.com)
- [www.asoftmurmur.com](http://www.asoftmurmur.com)
- [www.noisli.com](http://www.noisli.com)



## Night Lights



# Further information and where to get help

## South Gloucestershire Sleep Toolkits

There are three other Sleep toolkits, categorized by age group, available on the South Gloucestershire Council website. The three toolkits are: **Early Years** - [Birth to five years](#)  
**Childhood** - [Five to 13 years](#) **Adolescence** - [13 to 18 year olds](#)

## Useful links

- [Family Lives](#) - Sleep advice for parents with disabled children
- [Sensory Strategy Book](#) (NAS)
- [A Sensory Life](#) - sleep challenges
- [Cerebra Charity](#) - sleep tips booklet
- [National Sleep Society](#) - ADHD and Autism
- [National Autistic Society](#) - Sleep and Autism
- [Options Autism](#)
- [Autism Treatment Network](#)
- [Sleep Foundation](#) - Children, teens and sleep
- [SCOPE](#) - sleep tips and bedtime routines for disabled children
- [Downs Syndrome Association](#) - Sleep problems in people with Down's syndrome
- [South Gloucestershire Family Young People Support](#) (FYPS)
- [South Gloucestershire Local Offer 0-25 SEND](#)