



Promoting Good Sleep in Children

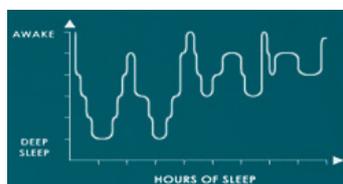
Sleep is essential for our physical and mental well-being. If our children are not getting enough good quality sleep it could be impacting their growth and development, their ability to learn and to self-regulate. If our children are not getting enough sleep, we probably aren't either.

What is normal sleep?

The table is a guide to children's average sleep requirements. Sleep is governed by an internal body clock that is influenced by external factors such as temperature, mealtimes, social activities and most importantly, light.

It prompts the release of 2 important hormones that tell the body to do something: melatonin - time to prepare for sleep and cortisol - time to wake up. A normal sleep pattern consists of several cycles through the night of lighter sleep going down into deeper sleep then rising into a lighter sleep/brief waking before repeating the cycle. Each cycle lasts approximately 90 – 120 minutes and consists of non-rapid eye movement (REM) (deep sleep) and REM sleep (lighter sleep where dreaming occurs).

Age of child	Average sleep need (hours)	
	Day	Night
1 week	8	8 ½
4 weeks	6 ¾	8 ¾
3 months	5	10
6 months	4	10
9 months	2 ¾	11 ¼
12 months	2 ½	11 ½
2 years	1 ¼	11 ¾
3 years	1	11
4 years	-	11 ½
5 years	-	11
6 years	-	10 ¾
7 years	-	10 ½
8 years	-	10 ¼
9 years	-	10
10 years	-	9 ¾
11 years	-	9 ½
12 years	-	9 ¼
13 years	-	9 ¼
14 years	-	9
15 years	-	8 ¾
16 years	-	8 ½



Problems associated with insufficient sleep

Good sleep is crucial for physical and psychological development. Insufficient sleep in children can cause failure to thrive, irritability, mood swings, poor concentration, challenging behaviour, poor memory, executive function deficit, language delay and hyperarousal. Sleep deprivation in adults affects ability to function and think and is linked with depression, obesity, immune dysfunction, cardiovascular problems, increased risk of road traffic accidents and premature mortality. So, if your family has sleep problems, it is important to seek help.

“Good sleep is crucial for physical and psychological development.”

Common sleep issues for children

Difficulties with sleep often include, problems settling and falling asleep, night waking and unable to get back to sleep, nightmares and night terrors, fear of being alone, early waking. There are many reasons why a child might have difficulties with one or more of these areas at some time, but children who have experienced trauma are more likely to have issues because of their past experiences. For example, they could struggle to settle because they are very sensitive to triggers such as loud voices or footsteps on the stairs. They may have difficulty remembering the stages of getting ready for bed or

not cope with the transition from playtime to bedtime. If they are anxious, it is likely that their instinctive brain is in control making it more difficult to access the emotional and rational parts of their brains. So rational explanations of why they need sleep will not help them deal with an overwhelming fear such as being left alone.

“If your family has sleep problems, it is important to seek help.”

Good sleep habits

Good sleep habits need to be taught/learned. Many children will not have had the opportunity to develop them and their sleep may have been disrupted by traumatic experiences. The principles of good sleep practice can be used with most children, but carers' also need to apply their knowledge and understanding of the causes and origins of their children's behaviour. For example, using a sleep routine appropriate for a child's developmental rather than their chronological age might work better. Helpful principles include:

- a regular bedtime and waking time so that the body clock is strengthened.
- establish a consistent bedtime routine. It may be necessary to keep it the same at weekends and holidays.

- don't allow prolonged naps in the late afternoon. If a daytime sleep is still needed, schedule the nap for early afternoon.
- help children to start winding down by encouraging quiet play in the evening.
- turn off screens an hour before bedtime.
- baths before bed are better than showers – less stimulating.
- ensure child does not go to bed hungry and that bedtime snacks do not contain caffeine (no chocolate), additives or sugar.
- use clear language such as, 'It's time to go to sleep now', rather than simply 'bedtime' or 'time to lie down'.
- have bedroom as dark as possible and keep it cool.
- keep bedroom calm with toys out of sight and clear of distractions and electronic equipment such as TV and other screens.
- have bedroom solely used as a place for sleeping (if possible).
- try to model good sleep patterns yourself and as a family. This is particularly important when your children are older.

Where to get help

Sleep Scotland provide UK wide services and a very informative website. www.sleepscotland.org



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

GET IN TOUCH

Call our helpline: 0808 800 0006 (freephone)
Lines open 10am-2.30pm, Mon to Fri

Visit our website at: www.kinship.scot

Email: kinship@adoptionuk.org.uk

 [kinshipcarecas](https://www.facebook.com/kinshipcarecas)

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

www.sleepscotland.org