

Helping a child experiencing problems sleeping

This leaflet has been created to help school staff to support a child experiencing problems with sleeping. Working alongside the school's ROAR or Mental Health First Aid Champion, staff will be able to decide on the appropriate action to take.

How much sleep does a child need?

All children are different, but generally each night:

- Children aged 3-5 need 11-12 hours
- Children aged 6-11 need 10-11 hours
- Teenagers need 9-10 hours.

Why do children experience sleep problems?

There can be different reasons:

- Bedtime fears - many young children are afraid of the dark or being left alone.
- Bad habits - such as napping too much during the day, eating a poor diet, use of electronic devices before bedtime or substance abuse.
- Anxiety, low mood or depression
- A chemical imbalance in the brain.
- Nightmares, sleepwalking, night terrors or insomnia.

Five ideas to help parent/carers support a child.

1. Make sure the child is comfortable. Not too hot, not too cold, not too noisy or bright.



2. Establish a good bedtime routine. For example: A warm drink, warm bath, bedtime story and say goodnight. Aim to get up and go to bed at the same time every day.
3. Encourage the child to do some exercise particularly late afternoon or

early evening, but not late in the evening to avoid over-stimulation.

4. If something is troubling the child when it's time to sleep, suggest writing it down or drawing a picture of the thoughts.
5. Help the child to relax before bed - reading a book, listening to music.
6. If struggling to fall asleep help the child to imagine being in a relaxing place, feeling happy and slowly breathing in and out.

Things to consider:

1. Avoid going without sleep for a long period of time
2. Encourage the child not to have too much caffeine or sugar in their diet.
3. Encourage families to have their supper early in the evening rather than late.
4. Don't allow the child to lie in for too long. After a bad night, don't let the child sleep in the next day, this will just make it harder to get to sleep the following night.
5. Don't allow the child to play computer games or overuse phones and other devices close to bedtime. Screen time may help with boredom, but it can make it harder to get to sleep as your mind is stimulated. Stop a couple of hours before you plan to sleep.

If the child is still giving you cause for concern, speak to your ROAR/MHFA member of staff for further advice.

Further information can be found at www.liverpoolcamhs.com/need-advice