

Autism Education Series: Sleep Basics

Why is sleep so important?

Good sleep helps your child (and you!):

- cope with frustrations better
- have enough energy for the day
- grow and develop
- feel happier and more positive
- learn and remember new information

Healthy Sleep is:

- appropriate timing - bedtime and getting up time fit in with family life
- adequate duration - check amount for age
- good quality - enough deep sleep, light sleep and REM (dream) sleep
- absence of sleep disturbances - no pain, breathing problems, noise etc



Sleep Amounts

Toddlers (1-2 years): 11 – 14 hours including naps

Preschoolers (3 – 4 years): 10 – 13 hours

Children (5 – 13 years): 9 – 11 hours

Daytime Strategies for Healthy Sleep

Daylight - exposure to light in the morning helps us feel awake and helps set our 'body clock'. Open the curtains or spend some time outside in the sun.

Exercise and Nutrition - aim for at least 60 minutes of physical activity. Try to avoid sugary, salty or caffeinated foods at least 6 hours before bedtime.

Napping - try not to have your child nap after 3pm.

Let's talk about sleep hygiene/habits!

Sleep hygiene means having habits that help you sleep well such as going to bed and getting up at the same time, and it also means your sleeping environment, such as a cool, dark, quiet room and comfy bed.

Tips for Sleep Success

1. Set a Routine - What can I do every day?

- Routines look different as your child grows up.
- Make a regular bedtime, wake-up time, and bedtime routine and stick to this. Consistency is key!
- The routine should be predictable (e.g., bath, brush teeth, read book, bed)
- Remember that too much or too little time in bed can make a difference on sleep.

2. Sleep Cues - Where does my child go to sleep?

- Make the bedroom a good place for sleeping!
- This means that the room should be dark and not too stimulating (e.g., toys, screens are not available).
- Settle you child to sleep in their own bed and try and keep bedtime a calm and happy time.



A note about screen time

- Having screen-free time before bedtime is important for good sleep.
- Using screens can be very stimulating to the brain and can get in the way of achieving good sleep.
- Consider some quiet, relaxing activities that your child can do before bed.

Remember, sleep is a skill! It is important to work on sleep, and learning this skill can take time.