



Getting a good night's sleep

This information sheet gives some suggestions for how you can help your child to sleep after a traumatic experience.

Some facts about children and sleep

- Sleep is a very important part of life.
Every child needs a good night's sleep in order to have a happy and healthy life.
- As children grow older, they need less sleep. The following list shows you approximately how much sleep children of different ages need:
 - Ages 1 to 4 – 11 to 14 hours
 - Ages 5 to 9 – 10 to 11 hours
 - Ages 10 to 14 – 9 to 10 hours
 - Age 15 or older – 8 to 9 hours
- For children to sleep well it is a good idea that their room is for sleep only if possible. This means not having a TV in the room and not doing homework in there either. If the child only associates the room with sleep then this will make it easier for him or her to get off to sleep at night. It can also be helpful if bedrooms are decorated in pastel colours, as this helps to make the atmosphere more relaxing.
- Sleep problems are common in children. Problems like having difficulty getting to sleep and waking up a lot in the night are the most common.

- When children have experienced terrible and stressful things or have seen them happen to other people, it is very common for them to have difficulties sleeping well. Children may have nightmares or find it hard to settle down to sleep because they are scared.

What helps?

Getting into a routine

- A bedtime routine is really important. This helps the mind and the body to get into a habit of settling down before sleep. An example of a bedtime routine is:
 - 7pm to 8pm – watch television
 - 8pm – have a bath
 - 8.30pm – get into bed & read a story
 - 9pm – lights out and time to sleep
- Do not let your child have sweets or drinks (such as squashes, fizzy cola drinks, coffee or tea) before bedtime – or do anything too exciting. These things can make it harder to sleep.
- A morning routine can also help. If a child is having trouble getting off to sleep at night or waking up in the night, it is a good idea not to let them sleep late in the morning. It is important that they get up at the same time every day until their sleep gets into a better pattern.
- It is a good idea to set aside some time in the evening to talk about any



worries your child has had that day.

This should happen before the bedtime routine starts. This could help to reduce their nighttime anxiety and reduce the likelihood of having nightmares.

Relaxation techniques

After the age of three, children can be taught self-soothing relaxation skills. This means that they can learn how to get themselves off to sleep. Two examples of self-soothing relaxations skills are given below:

Deep breathing

- Guide your child to place one hand on their tummy so that they can feel themselves breathing
- Ask them to close their mouth and breath through the nose
- With every breath in, they should notice their tummy rise, and with every breath out, it should fall.

Breathing like this helps the body to relax and sleep. It takes time to practice this so do not worry if your child does not get it right first time.

Please talk to your therapist about the suggestions in this information sheet if you would like more information or help practising them with your child.

Visualisation

- Guide your child to imagine something nice and relaxing, such as the sun going down, waves lapping on a beach, or a breeze rustling through the trees on a warm, sunny day.
- Encourage them to concentrate on the image and think about it in detail, concentrating on what they can see, hear, and feel in their body when they think about this situation.

This also helps the body to relax and sleep.

Soothing sounds

Playing relaxing music before bedtime can also help a child to get off to sleep. You can ask them to use headphones if they share a room.

Dealing with nightmares

If your child has had a nightmare, it is alright in the short term to reassure your child that it is just a dream. However, in the long term it is important that your child learns how to get him or herself back to sleep. Encourage them to use deep breathing or visualisation when they first wake up. You can practise it with them at first but they need to do it on their own in the end.

Compiled by the Children's Traumatic Stress Clinic
in collaboration with the Child and Family Information Group

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust
Great Ormond Street,
London WC1N 3JH

www.goshfamilies.nhs.uk

www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk