



Routine and Structure

How to support your child to have a good routine in lock down FAQs

The changes in education provision, community resources and new rules and regulations mean our usual routine and structure has been taken away. This can cause distress and confusion for most of us and can impact on our ability to access education, sleep well and feel good. Below are frequently asked questions about how you can find routine and structure amongst the chaos. They have been divided into sections about work, rest and leisure to make it easier to navigate but remember often each area will impact on each other.

Sleep/Rest

Remember when children's sleep patterns are disturbed this can often impact on other members of the family, poor sleep can impact on mood, sensory processing, appetite, concentration and tolerances of others. Be kind to yourself and don't try to be superhuman.

What is a normal amount of sleep for my child?

Different children need different amounts of sleep so there are no absolutes for this answer. As children grow their sleep requirements change. NHS choices website provides some information about the amount of sleep a child would typically need at each age.

Below are the approximate hours of sleep needed by children of different ages as described on the NHS choices website.

Toddlers 1 to 2 years old	11 to 14 hours including naps
Children 3 to 5 years old	10 to 13 hours including naps
Children 6 to 12 years old	9 to 12 hours
Teenagers 13 to 18 years old	8 to 10 hours

Does your child appear rested after their sleep?

For some children a shorter period of sleep is normal, and you are able to get up and feel energised again,

Some of us are in bed and 'resting' for 8-10 hours but sleep may be broken and the actual amount of sleep you have is less than the intended 8-10 hours.



It can be helpful to monitor your sleep to see how much sleep you have. There are various wearable types of technology which can do this however a word of caution sometimes this can cause more distress than it alleviates. Ideally minimising technology especially screens in the bedroom and before going to sleep helps us to have a better restful sleep.

My child won't go to sleep at night.

Firstly, let's think about what is usual for your child. Do they usually fall asleep well and the changes in routine and increased anxiety have meant there is a change? Or does your child usually have difficulty in switching off at night?

Changes in sleep patterns are often the first signs of imbalance of work rest and leisure.

Here are some tips on trying to fall asleep...

- Remove screens and technology for at least one hour before bedtime.
- Stick to a regular bedtime and awake time. It is often easy to let this slip and go to bed later as you have less of a need to rush up in the morning for school/work etc or you may have slightly different times for weekends. Try to minimise the changes to times for bedtime and morning alarms.
- Stick to regular wake times, whilst it can be tempting to have a lie in to make up for a poor night's sleep in the long run it causes disruptions to routines. Even if you have only managed a short sleep get up and get out for some fresh air engage in some alerting activities (activity which helps the fluid in the ear canal to move for example jumping or running)
- Try not to nap during the day, however tempting it is sleeping during the day will impact on how tired we get in the evening. If you can't avoid it, limit the amount of time you spend napping to 20/30 minutes and get up and get some exercise to wake yourself up again. Try not to nap in the hours on the run up to bedtime.
- Make sure you wind down
 - A warm bath (not hot) will help your body reach a temperature that's ideal for rest
 - Writing "to do" lists for the next day can organise your thoughts and clear your mind of any distractions
 - Relaxation exercises, such as light yoga stretches, help to relax the muscles. Do not exercise vigorously, as it will have the opposite effect
 - Relaxation CDs work by using a carefully narrated script, gentle hypnotic music and sound effects to relax you
 - Reading a book or listening to the radio relaxes the mind by distracting it



- Avoid using smartphones, tablets or other electronic devices for an hour or so before you go to bed as the light from the screen on these devices may have a negative effect on sleep

- Make your bedroom sleep-friendly
 - Your bedroom should be a relaxing environment. Experts claim there's a strong association in people's minds between sleep and the bedroom.
 - However, certain things weaken that association, such as TVs and other electronic gadgets, light, noise, and a bad mattress or bed.
 - Keep your bedroom just for sleep.
 - Your bedroom ideally needs to be dark, quiet, tidy and be kept at a temperature of between 18C and 24C.
 - Fit some thick curtains if you do not have any. If you're disturbed by noise, consider investing in double glazing or, for a cheaper option, use earplugs.

- Exercise
 - Regular exercise helps you sleep more soundly, as well as improving your general health.
 - Teenagers should be aiming for at least 60 minutes' exercise every day, including aerobic activities such as fast walking and running.
 - Exercising out in daylight will help to encourage healthy sleep patterns, too.
 - Make sure you don't engage in

- Food and drink
 - Cut out the caffeine/sugar
 - Suggest that your child cuts out or drinks less caffeine – found in drinks such as cola, tea and coffee.
 - Too much caffeine can stop children falling asleep and reduce the amount of deep sleep they have.
 - Sugar in squash fruit juice as well as fizzy drinks energises the body; think about how much you have throughout the day as well as in the hours leading up to bedtime.
 - Do not binge food before bedtime
 - Eating too much, or too little, close to bedtime can lead to an overfull or empty stomach. This can be a cause of discomfort during the night and may prevent sleep.



My child's bedroom is also where they do their school work and they can't switch off. What can I do?

For children, bedrooms are often somewhere we use for sleep, play and work. This can make it harder for children to associate the environment with an activity as it blurs the lines.

For some families it is possible for children to complete their school-work in a different room of the house and keep work outside of the bedroom. For other families this is not possible, and the bedroom environment turns into a school room/safe space/play area as well as for sleep.

If you have to use your bedroom for school work or play try not to use your bed for something other than for sleeping on, if you can't, consider removing the blankets/duvet or pillow so during the day it looks different.

Before you go to bed try to remove your school books/laptop from your bedroom and put things away in your school bag or a box somewhere different.

Try to get outside during the day for your daily exercise or a walk. If you don't feel up to that, or you're shielding or isolating perhaps consider standing in the garden or on the front doorstep for a few minutes breathing in that fresh air and waking up your senses.

My child can fall asleep but frequently wakes during the night. How can I support them to go back to sleep?

Sometimes falling asleep isn't the problem but staying asleep is. There can be different factors which cause waking at night and it can take time to identify what it is.

Thoughts/over thinking/worries

- Talk through any problems. Talk about anything they're worried about. This will help them to put their problems into perspective and sleep better.
- You could also encourage them to jot down their worries or make a to-do list before they go to bed. This should mean they're less likely to lie awake worrying during the night.
- For young children a worry monster or worry hand plaque can be useful tools to support them to let go of feelings and worries in a safe and age appropriate way.



Environmental

- If your child always wakes at a particular time of night, it may be that something disturbs their sleep. Does your heating come on then? Does the neighbour let the dog out at midnight? It's worth analysing what else is happening around the house and if anything can be eliminated. It may be as simple as swapping which end you have your head on the bed, so it is a bit further away from the radiator.
- Does the room get too hot or cold over night? Can you adjust the heating or what blankets you use on the bed?

Routines/habits

- Just as we can develop good routines and habits we can also fall into bad routines and habits. Our body clock may get used to waking up in the night and changing this habit is going to take time to change.
- If your child wakes in the night try to develop healthy routines to support falling asleep again, stick to the same routine every night. For example, use a white noise toy or listen to relaxing music quietly. Try not to use screens or games in the night as these promote wakefulness. Keep lighting low and stay warm and comfortable
- Keep your voice calm quiet and reassuring
- Use relaxation techniques or mindfulness techniques

Bad dreams and nightmares

- Many children experience nightmares and night terrors, but most grow out of them. They don't cause any long-term psychological harm to your child. Reassure your child and yourself that bad dreams are common.
- Nightmares in children can be caused by a frightening experience, such as watching a scary film, or by something that's worrying them.
- Nightmares occur from dream sleep (REM sleep). Your child may wake up from the nightmare and, depending on their age, may be able to remember and describe the bad dream to you.
- Talk to your child to find out whether anything is worrying them that could be triggering their nightmares. Do this during waking hours and not just before bedtime so that the discussion itself is not triggering of a nightmare
- Consider the TV/films watched or even the news as well as computer games try to limit what is watched especially in the evenings.
- For younger children a monster spray can be helpful (a spray bottle filled with water that can be sprayed around the bedroom to keep the monsters out)



My child has difficulties with their sensory processing. Are there any tips that can help with sleep?

Many children who have sensory processing problems find their sleep is impacted. Make sure that sensory activities during the day are varied to improve nighttime sleep, utilise tips from the Sensory Circuits programme.

Auditory

- Using ear plugs or noise cancelling headphones can be helpful in reducing noise stimulation at night
- Try white noise apps or toys. White noise refers to sounds that mask other sounds that might occur naturally in an environment. White noise could help block out noises associated with traffic or other children in the house.
- Use audio books in the evening, try to use familiar stories so your child is not desperate to keep listening and make sure the story isn't scary.
- Relaxation music can be helpful to support winding down, be mindful of the type of music some people find listening to rain or waves can mean you need the toilet.

Proprioception (Deep Pressure)

- Activating the proprioceptive sensory system is calming and reassuring. Some families have found using weighted blankets is helpful in providing that deep pressure during the night but they can be expensive and research for the effectiveness is limited.
- Deep pressure hugs or massages before bedtime can also help with proprioception input.
- Gentle yoga type exercises before bed may stimulate the proprioceptive sense, try child's pose or downward dog.

Visual

- Some children need it to be completely dark in order to fall asleep while others need to have a nightlight.
- It's a good idea to use a dimmable night light because that way, they can adjust to the amount of light they are comfortable with.

Gustatory

- Nutrition is an important piece of the sleep routine. Ensure that your child has a well-balanced diet, limited sugar and no caffeine.
- Some foods can be helpful in supporting good sleep routines such as milk, whole grain foods which have low glycemic index can help you to feel full for longer and release sugars in a slow pace.
- Highly processed foods often are more energising. Try not to have anything to eat immediately before bed.



Olfactory

- Some children like by putting lavender oil or another calming essential oil in a diffuser. You can also use lavender oil and Epsom salts in a warm bath before bedtime.
- There are various pillow sprays on the market which are said to aid sleep they may work for your child.

Tactile

- Think about the clothes your child is wearing should they be altered for the temperature.
- Some children like hugs and tight blankets some prefer to not have any touch at all, there's no right or wrong what works for your child is the best for them.

I didn't find the answer I needed here. What can I do now?

Sleeping difficulties are often not a quick fix and can take time to make changes, reassure yourself and your child that it is ok that something didn't work the first night forming new habits can often take several weeks, stick at it and stay positive.

Don't panic, there's always people to help. Get in touch with us at Open Arms Support contact m.cook@openarmsupport.co.uk or phone 01603 767498