



Difficulties with sleep



The ability to sleep and have an effective sleep and wake cycle is controlled by the area of the brain which facilitates self-regulation and interoception. Often children with poor regulation and sensory processing difficulties have altered or poor sleep patterns. Children with either poor registration or sensory seeking behaviours can find it hard to sleep.

Children who have poor regulation and are unable to self-regulate require and rely on co-regulation. Co-regulation is regulation delivered by their main caregivers to facilitate and support a child's self-regulation; this occurs through active care giving and provides the just right level of input needed. When a child has not established a sleep routine, a child may need a caregiver present or when a child experiences changes to their daily routine, a child may have difficulties sleeping. When this occurs, a child may need caregiving to help them learn to regulate and sleep. Sensory input can help to support one's sleep, see below, however, other strategies may also be needed. For example, children who seek caregiving or seek attention/attachment, may want you to be present when they are settling to sleep. These children may need to see you or hear you, therefore they may benefit from you carrying out certain activities prior to bed time i.e. a cuddle or massage, which then progresses to you sitting next to them and reading a book, and then you sitting near their bed and singing to them, and then you having their door open and you playing a few songs or having the radio on. This process starts with physical contact, and then slowly decreases the physical close proximity and replaces it with visual contact and then auditory contact. If the child become distressed as you reduce the contact, you may need to pause at a certain stage i.e. sing a song for longer. Hopefully as the sequence becomes familiar, it will speed up and child will be better at settling to sleep.

Here are some sensory ideas at may help:

Proprioception helps to calm and organise the body. Proprioception sensory input helps a child to settle to sleep and sleep through the night. There are ways to increase proprioception sensation, here are some examples relating to sleep:

- Use a heavy blanket or layer blankets so there is increased weight/compression on the child's body. **Ensure that the child's head is not covered.**
- Weighted blanket can be used to help a child settle to sleep but **supervision** is required when using a weighted blanket. A child needs to be prescribed a certain weight and sized blanket to ensure that the child is safe when using it. When looking into weighted blankets, please consult the provider and gain information on the precautions that need to be taken. Here is some information on the benefits of weighted blankets:



<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fhappyseniors.care%2Fen%2Ftop-pick-articles%2Fweighted-blankets-can-they-improved-the-quality-of-our-sleep%2F&h=AT3hhulx6pVDOS-pZpGXJLUykU1stmopkz1ZzgNf4kf68FQlZD0mzNlgNINwLzUys1pFIOo-ZiPZXP4iKpeK9Pb989euIEpKT5AJRGedqGXUjPGBKlyNskDI14&s=1>

- Compression clothing or clothing that is tightly fitted can help. This gives compression to the body; however, the child must feel comfortable and not too restricted. If a child shows distress or dislikes the clothing please remove it.
- Lycra pressure sheets can be placed over the bed. This is lighter than a weighted blanket and is less warm.



- Providing full body deep pressure prior to the child falling to sleep can be helpful. This could include a massage to the whole body or body parts. You may find that massaging certain parts of the body is more helpful or using certain massage tools is helpful. You can also use lotions, talc, or oils.



- Some children like to be cocooned by teddies or pillows. This provides a swaddle affect, and can create a boundary and sense of security.
- If your child prefers a contained space, a sleep bag could be trialled.
- A bed tent can sometimes help, this reduces distractions from light and noise but can also provide a contained space.
- Dark blind can help to cut out light
- Some children sleep better when their mattress is placed on the floor, especially if the child is not confident with heights.
- Tuck blankets in or cover the duvet around the child. You may need to experiment with how tight the child likes it, but you must always ensure that the child is safe and can **remove themselves** from it if they need to. The intention is to provide regulating sensation.
- Some children like vibration sensation and find this helpful. You will need to establish if this is helpful for your child. Some children may find vibration alerting, whereas others find it calming and relaxing. There are vibrating pillows that can be purchased and used to help a child to settle to sleep.

Vestibular (movement) sensation:

Movement also provides relaxing and calming input to the body. Linear movement (forward and backward movement) is calming and helps to settle the child.

Here is a link explaining how movement helps with sleep:

https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.medicalnewstoday.com%2Farticles%2F324275&h=AT3QqyQ0WWmR32NllR06luYXNjiTd62VRGSuDp9kOh8XYloe_iQtO79_WD6O9dcQl8TX2G-Y-1Ulch-_o-X7H39LssjRI1v9hDluv0tzuunh42Zu5C3Wjhy-bJz7&s=1

Here are ways to provide linear movement:

If the child is small and you are able to hold them, you could place them on your knee and facilitate forward and backward rhythmical rocking or swaying. However, if your child is larger, you will need to use furniture or play equipment to provide this sensation. A swing, rocking chair, hammock or use a garden chair that moves, to give linear movement. Access linear movement for 10-15 minutes prior to bedtime, may give the child the increased sensation that is needed.

Auditory (sound) sensation:

- A slumber bear or product that provides white noise. Low level background noise may be helpful. It may distract a child from their thoughts and provide regulating input.
- Reading books to your child can be helpful. Books that relate to sleeping can be helpful, for example, Hush a bye bunny by Holly Surplice.
- Play relaxing music or music that relaxes your child.
- Have the radio on.

Things to try and avoid:

- New activities or engagements that will excite. The purpose of a bedtime routine is to help the child and their body to recognise the clues for sleep.
- Reduce unnecessary stimulation in the room
- Avoid face washing and teeth cleaning directly before bedtime, these personal care tasks can be altering and may over stimulate the child.
- Too much visual stimulation such as video's, iPad's, phones etc.