

# Supporting children with sleep difficulties

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It will not surprise you to hear that parents of children with additional needs experience increased vulnerability to their wellbeing. Navigating health, education and social care systems for assessment, diagnosis, treatment and support can become a full time job that may feel like a battle. This may leave you with less time, and energy for all the reasons you became a parent for - developing a happy, healthy and loving family life. Research highlights risks to mental health, including stress, anxiety and depression for parents of children who need extra support. The impact upon family relationships and organisation are significant also, and while you are making sure everyone else is okay, a priority must be that you are too.

Positive thinking is like exercise, easier to do if you practise regularly; and if out the habit, hard to do at first. Staying in touch with others who are positive and supportive reduces negativity. Developing positive relationships with school, relatives, neighbours, even if they have been tricky raises resilience. Change can represent excitement or anxiety; look for opportunity over threat when times are

tough. Regularly remind yourself when you have managed things well and felt strong. If negative thoughts persist, challenge them: where's the evidence?

Recognise that you are human; try could or maybe instead of should or must – flexibility reduces pressure. Simplify tasks where you can and focus on what you can control or do to avoid wasting energy. If things feel too much, take some time out.

It's easy to feel isolated and neglect yourself. Try to rest and sleep well; drink enough water and remember to eat healthily where possible; avoid overindulging food or alcohol as doing this will increase any negative thoughts. Exercise helps us physically and emotionally. Where possible, get outdoors and see the sky in daylight. Life can take over any social life – making time with friends or making new ones can be done in person or online; especially important if you parent alone.

Asking for help is not a weakness or a sign you are not coping. Being assertive may not be something that comes easy. Others may want to help but uncertain how to help or when. No prizes are won for doing everything for everyone all of the time. Being clear and direct helps you achieve





Developing routines and habits that keep you and others organised may seem like a chore in itself but will save time, energy and unnecessary stress. Prompts and reminders on a visual timetable or using your mobile phone can be helpful; however if you need to, let it go. Everyone feels calmer when they know what is happening and when. Breaking big tasks into smaller ones that are realistic to complete helps to avoid frustration if you run out of time.

Mistakes are okay; getting frustrated, angry and saying things you regret are part of being human. Acknowledge mistakes and forgive yourself to avoid inner guilt. Modelling how to do this helps your children learn how to move past difficulties.

Maintaining a relationship alongside family commitments can fall down a list of priorities. At times your relationship may feel like a tag team or good cop bad cop. Paying attention, little and often can make all the difference. Finding time to talk at the end of a day, sharing a highlight and lowlight. Checking in with each other and being heard encourage feelings of being valued and shared perspective. Recognise you are different people who will always do things slightly differently with children doesn't make one right or wrong; aim for

consistency of approach, especially with house rules around behaviour. Play to strengths and try to share effective strategies. Relationships can be successful when partners' needs are met, doesn't have to be all of them but a balance of some. Make plans to have time together; can be just for a coffee or a walk in the park once a month if possible.

Make time for laughter. Schedule a favourite movie, program, box set, podcast or comedian that tickles your funny bone. Laughter changes

Relax? Do do it! The word stress means too much or not enough of stimulation. If you need to do more to feel relaxed; do things that you enjoy e.g. gardening, cleaning out the cupboards, exercise. If you need less: bubble bath, quiet time, breathing, yoga, reading; whatever works for you. Being able to relax sometimes needs practice but just as important as food and water. You need it to refuel your physical and emotional state to be ready for whatever comes next.



The well-being of children is a priority for every parent. Achievable if parents' wellbeing is looked after also.

Be kind to yourself and set yourself a goal. What small thing can you try to do that will increase your well-being today?

## Sleep Difficulties

*These difficulties impact upon daily functioning, physical and emotional well being and unmanaged, life expectancy.*

Sleep Disorder	Problems	Causes or risks	Treatments
<b>Insomnia</b>	Problems sleeping despite being tired (fatigued, low energy, poor concentration, mood disturbance, decreased functioning)	Environmental or shift changes; poor sleep hygiene; some medications.	Behavioural; psychosocial; medication; sleep hygiene; combination of all
<b>Hyper Somnolence</b>	Significant episodes of sleepiness after 7 hours of good sleep	Family history; excess alcohol; viral infection; head trauma; depression; bipolar; Alzheimer's or Parkinson's or none of these.	Good sleep hygiene; amphetamine; methylphenidate; modanfil; antidepressant; monoamine oxidase inhibitors.
<b>Central Sleep Apnoea</b>	Where breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep; abrupt awakenings; shortness of breath; mood changes; morning headaches; snoring.	Affected brainstem; brain infection; stroke; neck/spinal conditions; high altitudes; severe obesity; narcotic painkillers.	Treating existing conditions alongside an assistive breathing device or supplemental oxygen.
<b>Obstructive Sleep Apnoea</b>	where the muscles and soft tissues in the throat relax/collapse to cause a total blockage of the airway. Loud snoring; gasping; night waking and sweats.	Excess weight; enlarged tonsils/adenoids; dental conditions; Down Syndrome; Pierre Robin Syndrome.	Weight loss/lifestyle change; sleeping position; mandibular device; tonsillectomy; adenoidectomy; excess tissue removal.
<b>Non-REM Sleep Arousal</b>	Repeated episodes of incomplete awakening from sleep that include behaviours such as sleepwalking and sleep terrors.	Sedative use; sleep deprivation; sleep schedule disruption; physical or emotional stress.	Making the environment soft & safe; locking doors & windows; medication; good sleep hygiene.
<b>Circadian Rhythm</b>	Internal (endogenous or built-in) abnormalities of the circadian rhythms, the body's internal clock. Sleep/wake schedule misaligned.	Shift work; jet lag; disrupted sleep schedule; poor sleep hygiene; chemical and biological differences in the brain.	Behavioural therapy; bright light therapy; medications; chronotherapy; good sleep hygiene.



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<b>Nightmare</b>	A parasomnia that involves unwanted events or experiences that occur while sleeping.	Stress, anxiety, an irregular sleep routine, overtired, medication use or substance misuse causing anxiety or distress. In some cases trauma or PTSD.	Counselling/therapy; positive imagery; anxiety management; relaxing bedtime routine; medication.
<b>REM Sleep Behaviour</b>	Acting out dreams that are vivid, intense and violent. Includes talking, yelling, punching, kicking; jumping, grabbing.	Usually middle aged or elderly males; degenerative neurological conditions; sedative or alcohol withdrawal.	Clonazepam; benzodiazepine; some antidepressants; melatonin; making the environment safe of risky objects.
<b>Restless Leg</b>	Neurological sensorimotor disorder; overwhelming urge to move the legs when they are at rest. Can be felt in arms, legs, torso and genital region.	may be related to abnormalities in neurotransmitters that regulate muscle movements, or abnormalities in the part of the central nervous system and sensory circuits.	Avoid stimulants,; regular exercise; hot baths, compresses; relaxation; weighted blankets; distraction techniques: reading, puzzles etc.
<b>Narcolepsy</b>	Rare long term brain disorder causes the person to suddenly fall asleep at inappropriate times: sleep attacks; sleep paralysis; cataplexy; excessive daytime sleepiness.	Low levels of hypodretin/orexin; hormonal changes; major psychological stress; infection e.g. swine flu.	Good sleep hygiene; timed frequent nap schedule throughout the day; strict bedtime routine; possible medication. Must inform DVLA.
<b>Hypoventilation</b>	Breathing restricts low oxygen levels, elevating carbon dioxide in bloodstream. Daytime sleepiness; frequent waking; morning headaches; faintness, reduced exercise capacity.	Underlying medical or genetic circumstance; use of opiates/alcohol; chest wall disorders; asthma; pulmonary disorders; hypothyroidism; obesity.	Weight loss; hormone treatments; treatment for substance misuse; breathing apparatus.