

Children with Hearing loss – Sleep Factsheet

Common sleep problems in children with additional needs

Every child is different and every sleep problem is unique. Many children with additional needs will experience a sleep problem during childhood as discussed in our factsheet “Sleep- Children with Additional Needs”.

There is a wide range of hearing loss from mild to severe, intermittent to permanent total hearing loss. A child who has any hearing loss is likely to have disrupted sleep. This can be in the form of difficulty in falling asleep or frequent waking in the nights.

There are a number of sleep problems which children with hearing loss may experience:

Anxiety – When a child is anxious the parent would normally respond by soothing them vocally. However, for the deaf child this is not possible.

Dark – When it goes dark the child loses two senses, hearing and sight (due to darkness). This can be very frightening for the child.

Quietness – For a child who is reliant on hearing aids during the day, when they are removed at night, the world may become very quiet and scary.

Balance – If the child has balance issues related to hearing loss, when the room is dark and they have less support available they may find that they feel more disorientated.

Tinnitus – Some children experience tinnitus, which is a constant ringing noise in the ear. When the daily distractions are removed for bedtime and night, this internal noise may become more apparent and intrusive.

Audio Cues – Many of the bedtime cues are supported by audio input, such as music, voices, sharing bedtime stories and soothing words as part of settling.

Supporting a child with hearing loss - to get a good night's sleep

There are a number of ways to help a child with hearing loss get a good night's sleep. Firstly it is usual that if one sense is reduced or not present the other senses become more alert. Therefore it is important to use the other senses when planning bedtime routines and when implementing any sleep strategies. If the child has vision, this will be the most important sense which they will be reliant on, especially at night.

When two senses are impaired the child may feel very vulnerable. (A child with hearing loss in the dark) Helping them prepare for bed using visual cues can support the sleep/wake cycle. Using a small night light or glow stickers can often help a child feel more confident. This will also provide a focus to help children settle to sleep.

Bedtime routines

It is really important to get a good bedtime routine in place as early as possible. This will support the child going to sleep now and in the future. Putting together a routine that is tailor made to meet the child's physical, sensory, learning, communication, understanding needs is imperative in getting the best night's sleep.

Setting a good bedtime routine is a common and well evidenced sleep technique to aid sleep onset and resolve bedtime battles. Use other cues to help reinforce routine such as using touch and visual aids, these will help the child understand what is expected of them.

Visual timetables

Using a visual timetable can help reinforce new routines and will strengthen the child's understanding and what is expected. These are particularly helpful for supporting a good bedtime routine. It allows the child to see what is about to happen. There are many online support templates for visual cards and timetables.

Here is an example using a variety of pictures to illustrate what is available. It is always best to use similar types of symbols or pictures rather than a mixture as below:



These demonstrate a timeline for a simple bedtime routine.

BATH- BRUSH TEETH- PYJAMAS ON-INTO BED-STORY-THEN TO SLEEP.

Use pictures which your child will understand, recognise and be able to relate to. The timetable should be simple and meaningful for the child. To help you put together a bedtime time line, talk to your speech and language therapist or specialist health visiting team.

Hearing aids

When hearing aids are removed and the world becomes quiet, using other focal distractions such as a small night light or glow stickers can help. Keeping hearing aids in until they are about to settle to

sleep, so that it is associated with falling asleep happily may be better than taking them out too early.

Timers and clocks

Timers and clocks are very effective in supporting the timing of activities and helping a child to prepare for transition to the next activity. There are clocks available which represent daytime (awake) and night time(sleep). These simple visual messages can be used, even if the child does not understand “time” concept.



Light and Dark

As with everyone the circadian rhythm is partially governed by light and dark. It is important to reinforce the light /dark and wake-sleep cycle. Reduce light and any light emitting devices at least 45 minutes before bedtime will help melatonin production (the sleepy hormone).

If the child is nervous about complete darkness using a small nightlight or lava lamp in a safe place may help give them some light, but also a calming focal point when going to sleep.

Massage and touch

Using touch and massage can be hugely beneficial for letting children know that it is time to relax and go to sleep. This can be part of the bedtime routine. Touch used in a certain way can give the same message as a verbal one would. For example: After completing the bedtime routine and tucking your child into bed, giving them a kiss on the forehead just before you leave the room, could give the same message as “I love you, night night”

