

sleep tips for children with additional needs

If you have a child with additional needs and sleep issues, bedtime can be tricky.

Here is some helpful advice from Antonia Chitty and Victoria Dawson, authors of *Sleep and Your Special Needs Child*, that may help if your child struggles to drop off or stay asleep.

- Z** Explore reasons for your child's sleep issues. Underlying reasons may include sensory processing difficulties, lack of understanding about night and day or medical issues.
- Z** Record what is happening at night by using a sleep diary. Share this information with professionals to see if they can help you to explore why your child may have sleep issues and which might be appropriate strategies to try to improve your child's sleep.
- Z** Use visual clues to support your child's understanding. Visual timetables can help to show your child what is going to happen next during the bedtime routine. This can make the evening calmer and easier for you and your child.
- Z** Television viewing can hinder melatonin production so avoid any screens in the hour leading up to bedtime - this includes mobile phones and computer screens. Melatonin is the hormone that helps us to fall asleep and some research suggests that some children with additional needs may not produce enough or may release it later in the evening. Replace TV with calm activities like completing a puzzle together or colouring.
- Z** Review your child's diet to ensure that they are not eating or drinking anything sugar loaded before bedtime.
- Z** Ensure that your child is in a routine and put them to bed at the same time each night. It is also important to wake them at the same time each morning.
- Z** Review your child's bedroom and assess whether it is a good environment to promote sleep. If they are visually impaired or hearing impaired then sleeping in total darkness may be disorientating for them. Consider how their bed feels and whether it meets their sensory needs.
- Z** Sleep problems can be complex and it is important to try to identify whether your child's sleep issues are behaviour based or medically based. Ask your health practitioners for guidance make sure that you tell them about any unusual night time behaviours such as snoring, teeth grinding or night terrors too.

