

Establishing good sleep patterns

The following 'rules' have been shown to be helpful in restoring good sleep patterns:

- Put the child to bed at approximately the same time each night.
- A winding-down phase should be established in the hour before sleep. The phase should avoid rousing activities, but could include things like a warm bath or a bedtime story. This phase is important in letting the body know that sleep is approaching, and should begin to prompt the release of melatonin in the brain.
- For children with sleep problems, the bedroom should only be used for sleep. Televisions, tablet computers, laptops and mobile phones should ideally be used away from the bedroom, and not within the winding-down phase.
- Research shows that relaxation can reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, and promote feelings of rest after sleep. There are many guided relaxation audio tracks specifically designed for children. It may be helpful for the child to listen to a relaxation track during their winding-down phase.
- If the child/young person is still awake after 30 minutes, it is best to move them away from the bedroom and to do something different. Try a quiet, non-stimulating activity such as colouring or reading. Only return the child to the bedroom when they are feeling drowsier.
- Set the child's alarm/wake the child at a similar time each day (including weekends), regardless of how much sleep they got the night before.

What St Mary's offers

St Mary's School & College provides residential and non-residential education, care and therapy for pupils aged 7-19. Our pupils have speech, language and communication needs and may also have associated physical and learning difficulties.

Our therapy, health and wellbeing teams and on-site facilities enable us to deliver provision across the waking curriculum. Our model of integrated therapy means that the pupils' needs are planned, provided, and assessed in natural and functional settings. There is the opportunity to develop high levels of trust and familiarity leading to strong therapeutic relationships. Skills are addressed in the clusters which serve functions in the pupils' life maximising independence levels, and the development of 'tools for life'.

The ultimate aim is for every pupil to achieve as much independence as possible so that they can live a fulfilled life.

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Sleep in children and adolescents



A resource for
parents and
residential care staff.

The importance of sleep

Sleep is primarily of and for the brain. The brain needs downtime for what you can think of as regular 'house-keeping'.

It is especially important that children and young people achieve high quality sleep. This is because sleep is thought to play an important role in learning, memory and development. It is during sleep where the growth hormone is released in the brain. Lack of sleep can have a negative impact on children's mood, behaviour and levels of concentration. To this effect, sleep deprivation is often confused with symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Each child is different, but on average, 6-13 year-olds should be aiming for nine to eleven hours of sleep each night, and 14-17 year-olds should be aiming for eight to ten hours.



Causes of sleep problems

There are many different factors that can cause sleep problems in children and adolescents.

Here are a few examples:

- Excess caffeine intake throughout the day, not just at bedtime. Tea, coffee, coca cola, energy drinks (such as Lucozade or Red Bull) and hot chocolate should be limited during the day, and avoided at least four hours before bed.
- Strenuous exercise close to bedtime raises the body's heart rate and releases adrenaline.
- Anxiety: the fight or flight response leaves body ready for action.
- Depression: can lead to early morning 'wakefulness', usually from about 4am.
- Sensory stimulation– noise and light. Blue light emitted from tablet computer screens, television screens and mobile phone screens suppresses the release of melatonin in the brain. Melatonin is a sleep-inducing hormone.
- Bedwetting
- Night terrors
- Acute illness
- Sleep patterns
- Room temperature, especially when it is hot. Research shows that between 16°C and 18°C is the optimum temperature for sleep.

- Oversleeping during the day.
- Respiratory difficulties such as snoring and sleep apnoea can impair the quantity and quality of sleep.
- Developmental conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder can affect the body's internal clock, creating constant or occasional disruption of sleep patterns.

Sleep is pattern-based, and no matter how strange the pattern, the body will try to maintain it.

For children who sleep well, the bed and bedroom act as a signal or cue to begin to feel sleepy, and they may fall asleep quickly. Likewise, for children with sleep disturbance, the bed and bedroom may have become a signal for other things, such as:

- Lying awake
- Watching TV, going on Facebook, playing on the Playstation.
- Playing with their toys
- Eating

