



Healthy Families
County Durham

When Sleep Feels Hard

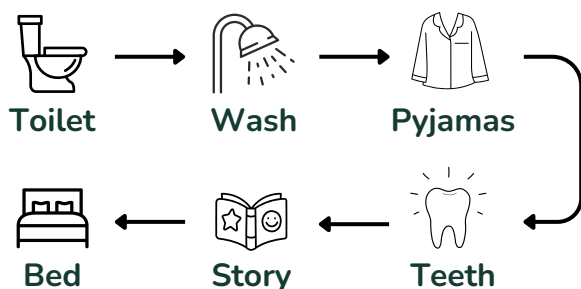
Sleep ideas for children with additional needs

Sleep can be difficult for lots of children.

For some children with additional needs, bedtime can be especially hard. Sensitivity to noise, light, touch or temperature, difficulty with changes in routine, anxiety and other health needs can all affect sleep.

Make bedtime predictable

Knowing what comes next can help some children feel calmer. Try doing the same few things in the same order.



Try a visual bedtime routine

Use words, pictures or symbols your child understands.

NOW

Brush teeth

NEXT

Story

THEN

Bed

There is no single bedtime routine that works for every child.

The aim is to find out what helps your child.

Think about what your child can see

Ask yourself:

- Is the room too bright?
- Are lights from outside coming in?
- Are there flashing or standby lights?
- Would a dim night light help?

Some children find darkness calming.

Others feel safer with a little light.

Think about sound

Ask:

- Can they hear people downstairs?
- Traffic? A TV? Other children?
- Household noises?

Some children need quiet. Others may find a familiar, gentle background sound easier.

Think about touch

Something comfortable to one child may feel very uncomfortable to another. Check:

- Pyjama labels or seams
- Bedding texture
- Clothing that feels too tight or loose
- Whether your child feels too hot or cold

Sensory sensitivities around touch, sound, light and temperature can affect sleep for some neurodivergent children.



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Give screen a bedtime

Moving away from a favourite game, video or programme can be especially difficult for some children. **Give plenty of warning.**

You could try:

- '10 minutes until tablet time finishes.'
- '5 minutes left.'
- Then move into the same calm bedtime routine.

NHS guidance recommends reducing screens before sleep.

Think about worries

Your child may be worried about:

- School or tomorrow
- Being alone or the dark
- Something that happened that day
- Something changing

If they can, encourage them to talk, draw or write about worries **before** bedtime.

Change one thing at a time

Trying to change everything at once can be hard for you and your child. Choose **one small thing** first.

Our first change will be:

Keep a simple sleep diary

For one week, write down what happens. You may start to notice patterns.

BEDTIME

TIME THEY SEEMED TO FALL ASLEEP

NIGHT WAKING

WAKE-UP TIME

ANYTHING DIFFERENT THAT DAY

When to ask for more help

Speak to a health professional if sleep problems:

- Continue over time
- Significantly affect your child or family
- May have an underlying health cause

NHS guidance recommends seeking further professional advice when a child's sleep remains difficult.