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## Sleep: Tips for Parents

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Sleep is critical for children's brain development. Primary school-aged children need ten to eleven hours of sleep each night. Without enough sleep, children struggle to regulate their emotions and behaviour, and find it harder to focus at school.

Sleep difficulties can have many causes — emotional, physical, and developmental. Here are nine tips from experts and parents for supporting children who are struggling to sleep.

### Tip 1 — Keep a regular sleep schedule

Try to help your child go to bed and wake up at roughly the same time each day. This encourages the body to expect sleep at a particular time, creating a natural rhythm of waking and sleeping.

### Tip 2 — Create a consistent bedtime routine

The brain takes time to wind down in the evening. A predictable bedtime routine — ideally thirty to sixty minutes long, done in the same order each night — helps children feel secure and signals that sleep is coming.

### Tip 3 — Create a soothing sleep environment

Make sure your child's bedroom is comfortable, dark, cool, and quiet. If they are anxious in the dark, a nightlight can help. Keep technology out of the bedroom and avoid screens in bed.

### Tip 4 — Reduce stress before bed

Stress makes it harder for the brain to switch off. Some children find it helpful to write down worries before bed. Distraction, storytelling, or gentle grounding exercises — noticing what they can see, hear, and touch — can also help ease anxiety. A nightlight or a favourite soft toy can make them feel safer.

### Tip 5 — Encourage exercise and daylight

Being active during the day supports good sleep. Sunlight helps regulate the circadian rhythm — the brain's internal 24-hour clock. Getting outside in the morning and around sunset can be particularly helpful.

### Tip 6 — Make a plan for night waking

Some children wake in the night and need a parent to settle them back to sleep. As they get older, you can help them learn self-soothing strategies — such as switching on a nightlight or reaching for a favourite toy — so they can gradually manage this themselves.

### Tip 7 — Listen to what they need

Every child is different. Some find gentle background noise relaxing; others find it unsettling. Help your child discover what works for them and adapt their routine as needed.

### **Tip 8 — Consider their diet**

After lunchtime, try to avoid energy drinks, fizzy drinks, and chocolate, all of which contain caffeine. Having an earlier evening meal can also help the body be ready for sleep.

### **Tip 9 — Ask for help if needed**

If your child has persistent sleep difficulties and is tired during the day, seek professional advice. If they experience snoring, coughing at night, sleepwalking, or bed wetting, the GP can check whether anything else is contributing.