**TAKEN FROM SLEEP SCOTLAND WEBSITE:**

**GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS**

**1. Work out how much sleep your child needs**

* How long should my child sleep?  Starting from the time you want your child to wake up in the morning, count back to the time they need to fall asleep.
* For example, 9-year-old children need around 10 hours of sleep a night; if your 9-year-old needs to get up at 7 am, then they should be falling asleep around 9pm.

**2. Have a consistent routine**

* Get your child up at the same time every morning and have their bedtime at the same time every night, even at weekends and on holidays.
* To make sure their bodies are creating melatonin and reducing cortisol at the right time, children need to have a consistent routine which signals to their body that it’s time to sleep. Changes in bedtime routine or exciting activities just before bed can stop children from sleeping.
* Even one or two late nights or lie-ins can upset their sleep routine and lead to problems falling asleep the next night

**3. Wind down for sleep**

* Take an hour before bedtime to relax.
* It’s important to be as relaxed as possible at the time you want to fall asleep. If we’re excited or anxious, then our bodies produce extra [**cortisol**](https://www.sleepscotland.org/new/support/gateway-to-good-sleep/what-makes-us-sleep/), a hormone which wakes us up and suppresses the production of [**melatonin**](https://www.sleepscotland.org/new/support/gateway-to-good-sleep/what-makes-us-sleep/), the hormone which encourages us to become sleepy. For children, lots of activities can create cortisol in the body – for example playing with friends, watching TV or exercising. If we have too much cortisol in our bodies before bed, it will stop us falling asleep.

**DO** –

* Move your child from the daytime part of the house to the night-time part, during the wind-down hour. This means that there’s a clear transition between daytime and bedtime for them.
* Spend one-to-one quiet time with your child.
* Listen to relaxing music or audio books.
* Read stories.
* Do calming crafts like knitting, puzzles or jigsaws.
* Do colouring or drawing.
* Have a bath – the rise and drop in temperature will relax your child and prepare them for sleep.
* Dim the lights – this encourages your child’s brain to get ready for sleep.
* Meditate or listen to a guided visualisation.
* Do stretching or yoga exercises.
* Try a massage or story-massage.

**DON’T** –

* Allow your child to watch TV or anything with a screen.
* Start any energetic or exciting play e.g. splashy bath or chasing games.
* Begin in-depth chat about anxieties or worries (save this for earlier in the day).
* So, for example, our 9-year-old who needs to go to bed at 9 pm will need to start their wind-down hour at 8 pm.

**4. Keep the bedroom calm**

* Try to ensure your child has a quiet, calm, dark bedroom to sleep in. Even if children play in their bedrooms during the day, it’s important that bedrooms become quiet, calm and dark before bedtime. Any stimulation before bed may keep your child awake. For young children, this could include sleeping in the same room as siblings, or even anxiety about being left alone in their bedroom. For teenagers, it could be watching TV, gaming, or going on social media in their rooms. Tidy away toys at the end of the day, to avoid having too much clutter in the room.
* Make sure your child feels safe in their bedroom, and check that it’s not too warm or too cold (16-18 degrees is ideal).

**5. Ditch the tech**

* Avoid activities which use screens an hour before bed and keep screens out of the bedroom. TVs, tablets, phones, or anything with a screen gives off blue light. This suppresses the production of [**melatonin**](https://www.sleepscotland.org/new/support/gateway-to-good-sleep/what-makes-us-sleep/), the hormone which encourages us to sleep. Everyone can be affected by this, but young children absorb more of this light through their eyes, so it’s particularly a problem for them.
* Add in the fact that information or visuals from TV, phones, or tablets can be exciting or cause nightmares in children, and you can see why they’re a bad idea in the run-up to bedtime.

**6. Control light**

* Too much light tricks our brain into thinking it’s daytime and that we should be awake – this could be daylight sneaking into the bedroom, a bright light in the bedroom or bathroom, or light from a TV or phone screen.
* Remove screens and dim lights in the wind-down hour before bed, and if there’s daylight getting into the bedroom, consider putting up blackout blinds or curtains.

**7. Relax**

* Keep stress out of bedtime:
* Keep any talk about anxieties or worries to earlier in the day, well before the wind-down hour
* Make sure your child has de-stressing activities during the day – exercise, listening to calming music, colouring, or walking the dog
* Try relaxation, guided visualisations, yoga, breathing exercises, or stretching in the run-up to bedtime, to help get rid of stress and tension in the body
* Stay calm yourself at bedtime, to help your child relax
* Practice! It may take time to find the right activity that helps your child relax – what works for one child does not always work for another

**8. Exercise in the daytime**

* Getting out and exercising during the day will help your child feel tired at night and is a great way of reducing stress. If you can, encourage them to walk, run, play or exercise outside in the sunlight early in the day.
* Don’t do strenuous exercise in the 2 hours before bedtime. Gentle stretching or yoga are a great alternative for releasing tension in the wind-down hour.

**9. Eat to encourage sleep**

* It’s best not to eat too heavily in the run-up to bedtime, so that your body is not digesting overnight. Avoid snacks less than an hour before bedtime, but a light supper before this (milk, toast, a banana, or crackers and cheese) can help your child to sleep through the night.
* Some foods are rich in tryptophan, which helps us to feel sleepy:
  + Turkey and chicken
  + Milk
  + Beans
  + Peanuts
  + Sunflower and pumpkin seeds
  + Eggs
  + Spinach
* Some foods make it harder to sleep:
  + Chocolate
  + Sweeties
  + Other sugary foods
* It’s important to think about what your child is drinking, too. Water, warm milk, herbal teas and small amounts of diluting juice are fine. Cola, energy drinks, or any drinks containing artificial sugar and/or caffeine can be a real problem – caffeine can stay in some young people’s system for up to 10 hours.
* During the daytime, try to keep regular mealtimes – this will help your child’s body clock to regulate their sleep.

**10. Napping**

* If your child still needs a nap, make sure that they’re awake again by 2 pm – any later will delay them feeling sleepy at bedtime. Older children and teenagers should try not to nap during the day, but if they need to, keep it to no more than 20 minutes, and be awake again before 2 pm.

**11. Manage life changes**

* Big changes in life can make it hard for your child to relax before bed or may make their routine inconsistent – which could disrupt their body clock. This could be things like moving schools, the arrival of a new brother or sister, or parents separating.
* Do what you can to give your child as much consistency as possible. Make sure they feel comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings during transitional times.