



SLEEP AND SPEECH/LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

(Composed by Speech and Language Therapy Department)



The importance of Sleep for Speech/Language Development

There is a lot of research on the importance of night time sleep for speech and language development in children. Sleep quality and quantity are important for memory and learning (Antony & Paller, 2017). Both memory and learning ability are essential for language development. There is also research that has found links between deep sleep and children's comprehension skills, their ability to remember new sound combinations, remember complicated grammar rules, and remember vocabulary words (Edgin et al., 2015).

How much sleep should a child get?

The recommended amounts of sleep for children of different ages are:

- Toddlers (1-2 years): 11–14 hours per night; 1–3 hour naps (decrease to 1 nap at 18 months)
- Pre-schoolers (3-5 years): 11-13 hours per night; Usually don't nap after 5 years
- School-Age (6-12 years): 9-11 hours per night
- Teenagers (13-18 years): 8-10 hours per night

(National Sleep Foundation, 2020)

Sleep Tips and Tricks

Create Structure and Routine during the Day. Everything we do during the day has an impact on sleep. Both adults and children benefit from a routine. It is best to keep structure during a child's day. You could use a 'Daily or Weekly Visual Schedule' to add regularity, structure and routine to your child's day. The schedule could encourage different activities throughout the day such as exercise, baking, sensory breaks, games, chores / independent living skills and some table top activity. Our resource handouts: '*Visuals Schedule Guide*' and '*Blank Weekly/Daily Schedules*' which are available to download on our website, will give you further information on using visuals to add structure and routine to your child's day.

Limit Screen Time: Too much screen time can negatively impact on a child's sleep and language development and has also been linked to attention, short-term memory and reading problems. Over time, these effects can add up to a significant, chronic deficiency in sleep. Screen time includes time spent watching or interacting with any type of screen-based devices, such as tablets, TVs or smartphones. There are studies which show that increased screen time places infants at risk for expressive language delays and can result in young children saying fewer words (The American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017). The World Health Organisation recommends no screen time at all for



infants up to age 2, and only an hour a day for children ages 1 to 5. For children aged 5 to 18 it is recommended that parents place consistent limits on the use of any device.

It is important to initiate a digital curfew for the entire family, a time at which you and your children turn off all electronic devices for the night. Try setting the curfew at two hours before bed, one hour before bed, or even 30 minutes before bed—the earlier in the evening the better, but whatever feels realistic to you.

Encourage Exercise during the day: Instead of having screen time, encourage your child to be more physically active throughout the day. Encouraging a child to be more physically active during the day will have a positive impact on a child's health and sleep. Erica Hargaden, a Child Sleep Consultant, believes that children need physical activity to enable them to be tired enough to initiate and maintain sleep and furthermore to provide the quality of sleep required for their growth and development.



Create a Relaxing Bedtime Routine: It is important to have a relaxing routine before sleep. A 20 - 30 minute bedtime routine is a great length to wind down and prepare for sleep. Here are some ideas on how to create a relaxing bedtime routine and nurture your child's language development at the same time:

1. **Talking about the day** - Bedtime is when children are most likely to open up and talk. Encourage your child to recall the positive experiences of the day. You could start off by telling your child about the happy things that happened to you that day. Encourage your child to think of 3 of the best things that happened that day. Other questions you could ask your child: "What was the best part of your day?" or "What fun thing did you do today?"
2. **Reflective Journal** - Reflective journaling is writing or drawing about your thoughts, feelings, experiences and ideas. It's basically like keeping a diary, but you don't necessarily have to write every day and you can use lots of different ways to express yourself other than writing. A photo, a drawings, a leaf glued in - anything that helps your child reflect on their day.
3. **Audio Stories** - In an ideal world we would sit at our children's bedside and read to them until they fall asleep every night, but many of us have commitments that begin when the children go to bed and still more of us are just too tired to face a lengthy story session. This is okay. Audio books for children are a nice alternative.
4. **Lullaby** - Lots of us sing to our babies, but how many of us carry that ritual on through childhood? Sing your child's old favourite or more modern songs your child enjoys.
5. **Story Telling** - Storytelling and using your child's imagination helps children unwind. There are a lot of ways you can tell stories together, here are a few ideas:



- a. Talk about your own childhood. Children love hearing tales about what mum or dad got up to when we were little.
- b. Talk about your ancestors. This is a great way to pass down family stories when children are young.



- c. Talk about the child's childhood. Children love hearing stories about themselves.
 - d. Or make up your own stories about your child's favourite characters.
6. **Read a Book** - Reading a book with children before bedtime is a lovely bonding time that will create a comforting feeling that promotes better sleep. Story reading also helps in the development of a child's literacy skills, oral communication skills, listening abilities, memory and vocabulary development skills (Dickinson et al., 2012). Here are some tips when reading stories at bedtime:
- Let your child choose the book. If this isn't possible, offer your child to choose between two books you think they might enjoy.
 - Keep it fun and interesting – use an animated voice, use funny voices and make animal sounds etc.
 - Don't read books that are too long or advanced to keep the child's attention.
 - Involve your child in the story. Stop and look at the pictures in the book. Ask your child to name the things they see or name them for your child.
 - Talk about how the pictures relate to the story.
 - Show your child how events in the book are like events in your child's life.

