

Rest Time Strategies for Children with Disabilities

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Parents and carers of children with challenging behaviour, such as that associated with ADHD, know that bedtime can be difficult.

Children who have been diagnosed with attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often have difficulty in taking a long time to go to sleep. This may be related to ADHD or to the medication that many of these children take each day. Whatever the cause, bedtime routines may take much longer for these children.

The following information including cues and strategies are just a guide to help parents and carers in successfully assisting the child to become independent within the bedtime routine. It needs to be remembered that each child is different and develops understanding instructions and skills at different rates. Bedtime should not be an emotional time with both parties fighting.

There are no hard fixed rules for parents or carers to develop a sleep routine that occurs without the trauma and fighting however there are a number of different schools of thought in creating a positive outcome for both the child and the adult.

One recommendation is to allow a longer-than-usual bedtime routine for children who seem to need more time to wind down. After a few weeks of a 1-hour bedtime routine that the child seems to accept, you can decide whether you want to change the time. Again, if this extra time seems to be interfering with sleep or is difficult to manage, then parents should fade back the routine until it approximates the 30 minutes recommended. This is done slowly by decreasing the routine from 60 to 50 minutes. If, after 2 weeks, the child has adapted to the 50-minute routine, then cut back the time to 40 minutes, then 30 minutes.

Fading back the bedtime routine often prevents fighting at bedtime and lets the child slowly adapt to the restriction.

Factors about Sleep Patterns for Children with ADHD/ODD

- Most children with ADHD sleep well however problems do occur in getting and staying in bed.
- Children with ADHD can have behaviours that are difficult to entirely eliminate, however they can be modified to cause less stress and disruption.
- The longer a behaviour has persisted the longer it will take to successfully modify it therefore the adult needs to be prepared that the change or modification won't happen overnight.
- Sometimes a behaviour being modified may be replaced by other behaviours and the adult need to be aware and ready to restrict these as well.

Suggested Strategies

- Establish a regular, realistic bedtime. Making bedtime a little later and slowly decreasing that time may assist.
- Establish a pattern of pre-bedtime behaviour e.g. offer a small drink, put pyjamas on, clean teeth.
- Use a night light or some security for the child.
- Have a pleasant bedtime activity e.g. allow child to choose one book for adult to read and one or two books for child to read in bed alone.
- Once the routine has been followed say goodnight, see you in the morning and leave the room.
- Don't return to room in response to child calling out. Aim to ignore the behaviour.
- If child leaves the room remind him/her of rules and return child to bed.
- Ensure that the room is child-proof to ensure the room is safe.
- Use of graded change techniques can be used e.g. rather than aiming for all activities to be accomplished in one go select of aspect and slowly add the other rules.

References:

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