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Calming Strategies Before Bedtime



Community Paediatric Occupational Therapy Department
www.abm.wales.nhs.uk/childrensdevelopment

Introduction

Sleep is essential for a child's health, well being and development and so it is important that they are encouraged from a young age to develop good sleep routines. For the biggest positive impact, these need to be applied every day in the same way where possible. Some children need help to reach a calmer state ready for bed and so the following advice may helpful in supporting you achieve this.

The following types of sensory input are calming to our systems:

- Slow rhythmic **movement** such as swinging or rocking in one direction i.e. back and forth or side to side.
- **Deep pressure** to muscles and joints e.g. massage or firm squeezing.
- Proprioceptive activities i.e. those that include **heavy work** to muscles, traction or compression through joints, or strong contraction of muscles around joints.

Activities

- “Hotdog” e.g. roll the child up in a duvet and give them pressure with therapy ball (or your hands) down their back, arms and legs.
- Squashing yourself into the floor - encourage your child to place the palms of his hands on the top of his head and press down for 25 seconds.
- Squashy ball - encourage your child to hold the ball between two flat hands in front of the chest. Squash the ball hard to try and keep it flattened.
- Strong Man press-ups - child lies on their tummy on the floor and pushes up through his outstretched arms. Try doing press-ups against the wall or down on a desk.
- Bear Hugs - combine your bear hugs with gentle rocking back and forth for extra calming effect.

Tips for Bedtime

- A warm bath before bedtime is an excellent way to relax
- Provide a bath sheet or beach towel to wrap up in after bath
- Dress for bed while in the bathroom
- Allow a little time to relax and unwind before going to sleep – reading a book or listening to quiet music with a small light that can be turned off without getting out of bed
- Think about the bedtime environment – low level lighting, minimise distractions of toys or pictures, perhaps try using a sleeping bag or weighted blanket or a bed tent. Consider black out blinds to prevent early morning waking.

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