

Sleeping

Autistic children and adults can have trouble sleeping. There are a range of reasons for this, including difficulties with relaxing or winding down. The following strategies may help to develop a good sleep routine.

First establish and agree what time the young person is going to go to sleep. Decide this first and then plan the routine from there:

- If the young person has sensory difficulties with bathing or showering or finds this stressful, it may be better for them to bathe/shower in the morning.
- If they do shower/wash in the evening, they should aim to do this approximately 30 minutes before they plan to sleep as the fall in body temperature following a bath may help them to fall asleep.
- Plan quiet time in the hour before going to bed. Activities may include music, audiobooks, sleep meditation (for example, Yoga Nidra), etc. Some people find having particular sounds helpful, such as white noise or brown noise, and there is music that is designed help people relax, which can be found on YouTube. There is also dedicated internet radio, which plays beatless non-repetitive music called "Ambient Sleeping Pill" which can be helpful if it suits you (ambientsleepingpill.com). It is also available on Spotify and Bandcamp.
- Hand-eye coordination activities help to promote sleep such as jigsaws, threading and colouring-in.



- Avoid watching television or playing computer games the hour before bedtime.
- Young people should avoid fizzy drinks, energy drinks, blackcurrant drinks, chocolate, coffee, or sugary snacks in the evening.
- Our brain quickly associates certain environmental conditions with wake/sleep states. If we engage in other activities in bed, such as video games or social media, this can make it tricky for the brain to associate bed with sleep. The young person should try to only get into bed when they actually want to sleep.
- If they cannot sleep after 30 minutes, allow them to calmly get up and do something quiet and relaxing elsewhere, such as reading, colouring, etc. After 20 minutes, they should get back into bed to sleep. If they have not fallen asleep after another 30 minutes, they should get up again. This prevents the brain from associating the bed with sleeplessness/restlessness.

Further advice and strategies can be found here

Cerebra is a charity that offers a sleep advice service. They also offer have downloadable guides to improve your family's sleep: www.cerebra.org.uk

Family can also find advice and support for 'Autism and sleep' on Autism West Midlands online support pages: www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk

The National Sleep Helpline Free helpline run by trained sleep advisors. Open Sunday to Thursday, 7-9pm. Website: <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/national-sleep-helpline/> For all ages.

www.hunrosa.org provides comprehensive sleep resources, tips and guides to improve sleep health. Hunrosa also offer specialised support for neurodiverse individuals. They offer a 15 minute free consultation with a sleep specialist to discuss the support they can offer.