

PAEDIATRIC THERAPY SERVICE

Paediatric Occupational Therapy recommendations: TO HELP WITH BEDTIME AND SLEEPING

Tips around the routine:

- Try to implement a set bedtime routine that is the same every night if possible, keeping the environment as calm as possible
- Avoid alerting and stimulating activities (especially TV, computers, iPad / handheld devices / mobile phone games etc) for *at least* 2 hours (if possible!) before bedtime (see below for more calming activities to do with them)

Tips around the environment:

It is important to adjust the *environment* to reduce overall stimulation to your child's sensory system. It is important to think about:

- Reducing overall noise levels
- Listening to steady, calming background music
- Low lighting
- No strong smells or tastes
- Avoid very hot or cold sensations, including food/drinks
- Caffeine free drinks like Camomile or Horlicks can sometimes help (not too hot though)
- Have a special place as a 'chill out' room: Pop-up tents are ideal, with low lighting or just a torch, duvet and a few toys (e.g. books, action figures, vibrating toys)
- Use head phones to cut out other noise if it can't be cut out altogether
- Use lamps instead of overhead lights; avoid fluorescent lights

Before bedtime:

- Encourage a warm bath (not too hot) as this helps to calm the body. Get them to: lie and relax, wring out sponges/flannels, scrub body, blowing games with straws (low lighting in the bathroom can also help reduce stimulation).
- Help out with "Tidy Up Time!" (e.g. taking own things up to room): collect in one cardboard box that he has to push/pull, make sure it is heavy to start with by adding a few books (heavy work is calming).
- Brushing teeth using electric toothbrush, giving cheeks a 'massage' with it as well.
- Vibration: Use vibrating back cushions, hold vibrating toys to body or in hand, write/draw with 'squiggle, wiggle' pen.
- With your child, choose a quiet, calm activity, for eg.
 - Reading a book or listening to a 'spoken book' on tape/CD (available at most libraries). Try this lying on the floor or on the couch buried in cushions
 - Board games (be careful about not being too alerting) or puzzles
 - Craft activities: weaving, origami, stencils, sewing, and model kits

- Activities with the mouth: Blowing, sucking, chewing etc. Doing things with the mouth can be very calming. Blowing games using straws (e.g. blow different weighted objects across the floor), blow pens, chewing on tubing/straws
- Construction toys: Lego, Meccano, Kinnex
- Exercises with resistive bands: stretch between hands; loop around feet and pull against etc
- Making things with plasticine

Other ideas to provide calming deep pressure:

- Lap weights: Make a heavy comforting weight by filling a small pillowcase with rice/beans/sand. Start with 2-3 kilograms and find what works best for your child (should not be more than 10% of their body weight). Place this over their lap when they are sitting at the table or on the couch to get a calming effect on the muscles
- Lying on the floor to complete activities so that the tummy and front of body is pressed against the floor. You may also want to try using the lap weight across their back
- Gentle rocking chair – you may want to put in extra pillows so that they have lots of contact to the body
- Sitting on a beanbag so they are fully surrounded
- Wrap your child up in a duvet or in a sleeping bag, giving lots of deep pressure as you roll them up into a sausage; however make sure this is done in a calming way (use calm voice, low lights etc – if it helps, tell them you are getting them ready for bed by rolling all the busyness / energy etc out of them!)
- Some deep pressure activities you can do with your child before bed:
 - Encourage child to place palms on top of head and press down (can be described as squashing self into the floor) with even pressure for a count of 20. If the child is unable to carry this out, an adult can gently press down on the child's head or both shoulders
 - Encourage the child to hold a foam ball between both hands and squash flat for a count of 30
 - Half press ups – child keeps knees on floor and pushes up onto straight arms. Repeat 5-10 times
 - Using cushions, blankets or piles of mats, allow the child to wrap themselves up as needed. The child may also like to be 'squashed' by an adult.
 - Big bear hugs!

During bedtime:

- Keep their room "calming" as recommended above with environment tips (ie. Low lights, free from distraction etc)
- If it helps, have some lavender or camomile candles / essence to provide a calming atmosphere
- Roll a therapy ball up and down their back as they lie on their tummy
- Give them a deep pressure massage on their back (avoid light, tickling touch!)

- Use heavy blankets and duvets to give them extra deep pressure when they are in bed
- Use of a weighted blanket may be suitable – these can be bought online or made with “sand pockets” sewn into the side of a blanket. NB: make sure it is NOT more than 10% of your child’s body weight

Calming auditory options:

Music or relaxation CD’s can be calming – but remember that everyone is different! What you might think would be calming, might not be for your child, so find something that works for THEM:

- Try calm, even tempoed/beat classical music
- Nature sounds or white noise CD’s
- Try relaxation CD’s:
 - <http://www.relaxkids.com> - this does relaxation CD’s for children but also has a nature CD suitable for teenagers and adults
- Or even guided relaxation or meditation type ones can be calming (more for older children):
 - <http://www.guidedmeditation.co.uk/>
 - <http://www.hopethroughrelaxation.com>
 - <http://www.hypnosisaudio.com/>
- Sometimes children like to listen to audio books to help them calm down and fall asleep

All these activities should be calming for your child – if they experience any anxiety then do not continue with it (you know your child). Some activities may work better with your child than others – these are just suggestions; you will figure out what the best options are with them.

Don’t forget about the WHOLE sensory experience ie: physical environment, sound, lights as well as deep pressure (which has a proven effect on calming the body) to try and encourage calming down for bedtime.