

Children's sleep during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Tips for parents**



Getting enough good quality sleep on a regular basis is necessary for everyone's wellbeing. For children, sleep is particularly important as it supports growth, development, physical health, mood, behaviour and learning.

The practices we have all been asked to put into place to help limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), including self-isolation and physical distancing, are really important to help keep you and your family/whānau well. However, the social restrictions of staying in our 'Bubbles' and pandemic-related stressors are likely to impact your child's usual activities and routines, including sleep. Here are some tips to help you to support your child's sleep during this time of change.

How much sleep is enough?



The amount of sleep children need changes with age and, as they approach school age, many (but not all) children will stop having daytime naps and start to get all their sleep in one block of time at night. Guidelines for sleep duration per 24-hours (which may include naps) is 11 - 14 hours for toddlers, 10 - 13 hours for pre-schoolers and 9 - 11 hours for school-age children. Keep in mind that some children may need a little less and some may need a little more.

Regular bedtimes and wake up times



This is a unique time, so it is likely that day-to-day routines in your home are not exactly as they were before. Keeping that in mind, aim to keep your child's bedtimes and wake times as regular as possible (a similar time each day). If your child usually napped before the pandemic, for example in the afternoon at day care, try to continue with the same sleep schedule at home.

Bedtime routines



A consistent routine in the hour or so before bed can be reassuring for children and will help to cue their brain and body that it is time for sleep. There is no one right or wrong way to do this, so using a bedtime routine that works for you and your child is the way to go. This may include activities such as your child having a shower, brushing teeth, reading books, stories, songs and cuddles. If you already have a bedtime routine for your child, try to keep using it each night. If not, now could be a good chance to get one established while everyone is at home. Having a cosy, comfortable bedroom can also help your child to sleep well.

Daytime activity



We all have an internal circadian biological clock (body clock) that is the timekeeper of processes in our brain and body, including sleeping and waking. External time cues are needed to keep our body clock in step with the 24-hour day. Light is the most important of these and other cues include things like routine timing of meals and exercise. Children being physically active outside in the day light (ideally in the morning for at least half an hour) on a regular basis is good for their sleep, physical fitness and mental wellbeing. Now might be an ideal time to get into the routine of your 'Bubble' going for a morning walk (you might even spot some bears!).

Technology



Technology can help children to stay socially connected, be entertained and have fun. Being a little more flexible with rules around technology is understandable during the pandemic, but ideally ensure that your child is not using screen technology at least 1 to 2 hours before bed, to help them wind down and prepare for sleep, and keep bedrooms technology-free.

Caffeine



Caffeine can make it harder to get to sleep so try to limit your child having food or drinks with caffeine in, such as soft drinks. Ideally, make sure your child has no caffeine in the afternoon or evening.

See our website for links to other helpful sleep health resources and more information sheets about sleep for you and your whānau, including a special sheet for children www.sleepwake.ac.nz.



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