

Sleep Problems for Children on the Autism Spectrum

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A summary of an article from the Raising Children Network by Mary Kelly, Clinical Psychologist

While all children may experience sleeping problems, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more likely to experience difficulties such as irregular sleeping and waking patterns, sleeping much less than same aged peers, getting up during the night, and excessive sleeping during the day. This article explores some of the reasons for these difficulties, and outlines strategies to assist in settling and managing night waking problems.

SOME OF THE REASONS FOR SLEEP DIFFICULTIES:

- Communication difficulties- children may miss cues (that it is bed-time); and/or have difficulty communicating their need and/or want for something
- having routines and rituals that make it difficult to sleep if these cannot or are not strictly adhered to
- having favourite objects or associations, that without these children have difficulty settling
- other reasons including anxiety, hyperactivity, medication side effects, and medical issues

SOME SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING SETTLEINGS AND WAKING PROBLEMS:

- developing a positive bedtime routine
- deciding on an age-appropriate bed time- when your child is sleepy but not overtired
- pre-warning your child that bed time is approaching
- being consistent with how you warn your child that bedtime is approaching- using a clock or picture, and something you can use at other homes or on holidays
- quietly and calmly putting your child back to bed if they do come out
- developing an appropriate sleep environment
- varying your child's favorite bedtime object so that they don't rely on just one
- encouraging your child to fall asleep in their own bed
- if they experience anxiety, wrapping a blanket around them, using a night light, or playing some calming music

You may need to consult with a health professional such as a psychologist if the above do not help with settling your child and treating their sleep problems, and, there are other factors involved such as ill health, the effects of some medications, or medical conditions.

Full article:

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism_spectrum_disorder_sleep_difficulties.html