

SENSORY BASED SLEEP STRATEGIES

Bedtime Routine:

Incorporate deep pressure touch as part of your bedtime routine. For example:

1. Give a lotion massage using deep pressure touch.
2. Roll child up in a blanket and rock, either on your lap or beside you. Make sure shoulders and feet are covered for warmth.
3. Play “hot dog” or “squish”: sandwich child between pillows, or roll up in a blanket (with head out). Stop if child is uneasy.
4. Have child lie or sit on a blanket, then drag it across the floor. If you have a partner, pick up the ends and swing gently.
5. Sit in an oversized beanbag chair for snugness around the head and body; try adding a heavy blanket too.
6. Try rolling a therapy ball up and down the length of the child’s body to create deep pressure. Alternatively use a large cushion.
7. Using the flats of your hands press firmly down the length of the child’s body whilst they lie on their front.
8. Give a warm bath, but be mindful of soap scents, which may be alerting. Try putting a towel in the dryer during the bath, and then use it while still warm. Use firm pressure when drying with the towel.

Other Considerations:

- Experiment with different types of pyjamas; try tight and loose to see which your child prefers. Pyjamas with built in feet may irritate a child with touch sensitivity.
- Consider the type of bedding used. More traditional blankets, which are heavier and can be tucked in, provide your child with plenty of feedback through their skin as a reference to

where their body is. You could also experiment with a sleeping bag or using a double duvet to wrap around your child.

- Try a bed tent to block out distractions, light and noise.
- Consider the bedroom environment, lots of visual distractions with pictures, patterned wallpaper and toys can be distracting for some children. Consider a neutral colour on the walls and toys organized into boxes.
- If sensitivity to light is an issue try a blackout blind or repositioning the bed away from the light source.
- Some children who are sensitive to noise have found listening to a constant sound such as soft music or white noise can help to remove any unpredictable noise and also be calming e.g. classical pieces, baby Mozart (can be found at: www.youtube.com) etc.
- Place the mattress on the floor if your child is afraid of heights.
- Some children like to squeeze into places, consider placing the bed against the wall and placing cushions there.
- Blue light (standard bulbs) can interfere with the natural production of melatonin, a hormone that is produced to aid sleep. Red light bulbs or a shade does not.
- A predictable bedtime routine prior to bed can help e.g. Bath, teeth, story and bed. Use of visual supports can be used to help understanding.
- Be mindful of those activities, which appear to over stimulate your child and avoid before bedtime.
- Consider the use of a Go Grow clock to help your child understand the difference between sleep and wake up time. Available from Amazon, Mother care, Argos etc. The Gro-Clock has a glowing screen showing images of stars and sun to communicate the difference between sleep and wake up time. The small stars go out one by one during the night to show the passing of time. The changing images encourage children to stay in bed longer as they learn to “stay in bed until they see the sun”.