

## Counselling Connection:

# Sleep and Sleep Disturbances

For more information on Sleep and Sleep Disturbance ideas, contact Paula Knox, school counsellor.

### Sleep and Sleep Disturbances In Children

Sleep is essential for healthy human functioning. It is natural for trauma and stress to influence sleep patterns of people. Sleep disruptions can include difficulty falling asleep, increased nightmares, fear of sleeping alone, and frequent nighttime awakenings. Children might be consumed with worry thoughts prior to sleeping. These thoughts can create feelings of fear, anxiety and insecurity, which can contribute to nightmares. The body's reaction to a nightmare can be scary! Awakening after a nightmare is not always comforting, as the body takes time to realize that the scary dream was not real. The child can then become stressed about the nightmare happening again, which causes problems with falling asleep. It takes time for sleep to get better, but it can happen!

**Children can learn to feel empowered and in control when it comes to sleep and dreams. There are things you can do to help!**



### Benefits of Sleep.....

It is important to address your own sleep issues as well as those of the children in your care. Lack of sleep can impact our performance and health in many ways. Research has shown that those who get their shut-eye are more likely to experience improved:

- Memory
- Articulation
- Focus
- Reasoning skills
- Ability to learn
- Heart health
- Vision
- Anxiety symptoms
- Overall Mood
- Eating Habits
- Immune Systems
- Skin Appearance
- Chronic pain symptoms
- Communication skills
- Emotional regulation
- Cell/muscle repair
- Blood pressure
- Headache symptoms

*How might these benefits influence behavior and interactions at an adult's work place or a child's school?*

### How Can You Help a Child Fall Asleep?

- Implement a consistent time in the evening to start bedtime routine.
- Create a structured bedtime routine (warm bath, read a book, brush teeth).
- Avoid drinks with caffeine or sugar before bed.
- Encourage and model calming activities prior to bed (deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and visualizations. There are numerous free apps and online support).
- Allow for child to have objects/pictures that comfort him or her in or around bed.
- Spend some time connecting/cuddling with the child before bed so he or she feels safe.
- Allow child to share what is on his/her mind while you listen.
- Encourage child to give worries to a stuffed animal who will do the worrying for them while he/she sleeps.
- Model positive self-talk statements such as "I am relaxed, I feel safe"
- Together, think of a positive and calming memory that the child can focus on.
- Allow for calming music or sounds (lots of apps for this).
- Allow a nightlight if the child is afraid of the dark.

## How Can You Help a Child With Nightmares?

- Practice grounding strategies to allow child to feel present and safe (see example below).
- Validate the feelings that arise after a nightmare.
- Explain that nightmares can be scary but they are not real, cannot harm us physically and do not predict what is going to happen.
- Stay with the child to provide feelings of safety until he or she falls asleep.
- Allow child to discuss bad dreams and even draw characters from the dreams.
- Use humor if it feels appropriate (Change drawing of scary monster to a funny one).
- Allow child to crumple up picture of nightmare, stomp on it and throw in the garbage.
- Talk about a different ending to the bad dream that would be less scary.
- Create a 3D model of a superhero with the child who will protect him or her in the night.

## Grounding Exercise

Using the senses to become aware of the present can help to calm the nervous system after a nightmare. Encourage the child to take a deep belly breath to begin.

**5 - LOOK:** Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the closet, I see the clock, I see the picture frame.

**4 - FEEL:** Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel my heart beating fast, or I feel the ring on my finger.

**3 - LISTEN:** Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of a fan, the sound of an appliance or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.

**2 - SMELL:** Say two things you can smell. You might smell the scent of your room, or a pet next to you. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.

**1 - TASTE:** Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth or even the taste of your tongue. If you can't taste anything, then say your favorite thing to taste.

Take another deep belly breath to end.

## Use The Tools You Have!

There are numerous free apps and videos that can help you and the children in your care experience sleep success. Try using the following search terms to locate some Resources that might help:



- Sleep Stories
- Guided Meditation for Children/Teens
- Belly Breathing
- Strategies To Cope With Nightmares
- Muscle Relaxation
- Relaxing Sleep Music
- Sleep Visualization
- Talking to Children about Bad Dreams

Check out this site for more information on various sleep topics: <https://sleepfoundation.org>

### Newsletter References

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