Neurodiversity and sleep

Developed for the Essex Partnerships for Neurodiversity in Schools Project 2024-25

Draft - June 2025

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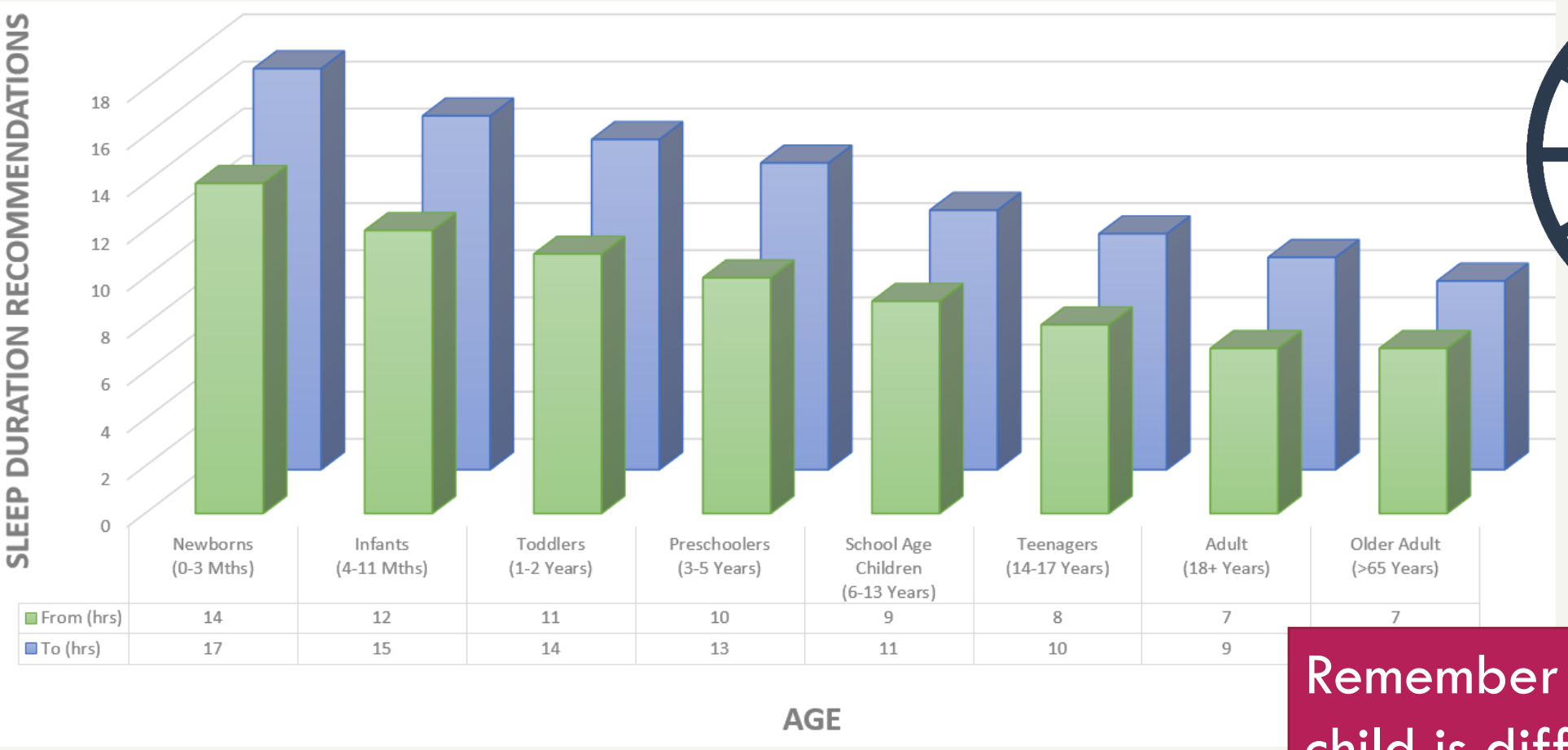
Understanding sleep

We cannot control falling asleep.

However, there are things we can do to ensure the best sleep environment and help support children to find falling and staying asleep easier.

How much sleep do children need?



	Newborns (0-3 Mths)	Infants (4-11 Mths)	Toddlers (1-2 Years)	Preschoolers (3-5 Years)	School Age Children (6-13 Years)	Teenagers (14-17 Years)	Adult (18+ Years)	Older Adult (>65 Years)
From (hrs)	14	12	11	10	9	8	7	7
To (hrs)	17	15	14	13	11	10	9	

Remember – every child is different and so are their sleep needs.

Quine Sleep Duration Chart [Sleep | NHS GGC]

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Light and dark

You only need
4 MINUTES
of daylight to stop producing melatonin.
Close the curtains in summertime in the evening to create a darkened environment.

Circadian rhythm

- Usually 24-hour cycle
- Regulated by day/night
- Can be affected by genetics, age or environment.
- Routine is vital to maintaining circadian rhythm

Sleep pressure

- Helps us know when we are tired
- Works like a battery
- Getting the correct balance is important

Melatonin

- Hormone which helps us sleep
- Darkness helps produce melatonin
- Light helps supress melatonin

*Sources: Circadian Rhythms - The Sleep Charity
Melatonin - The Sleep Charity

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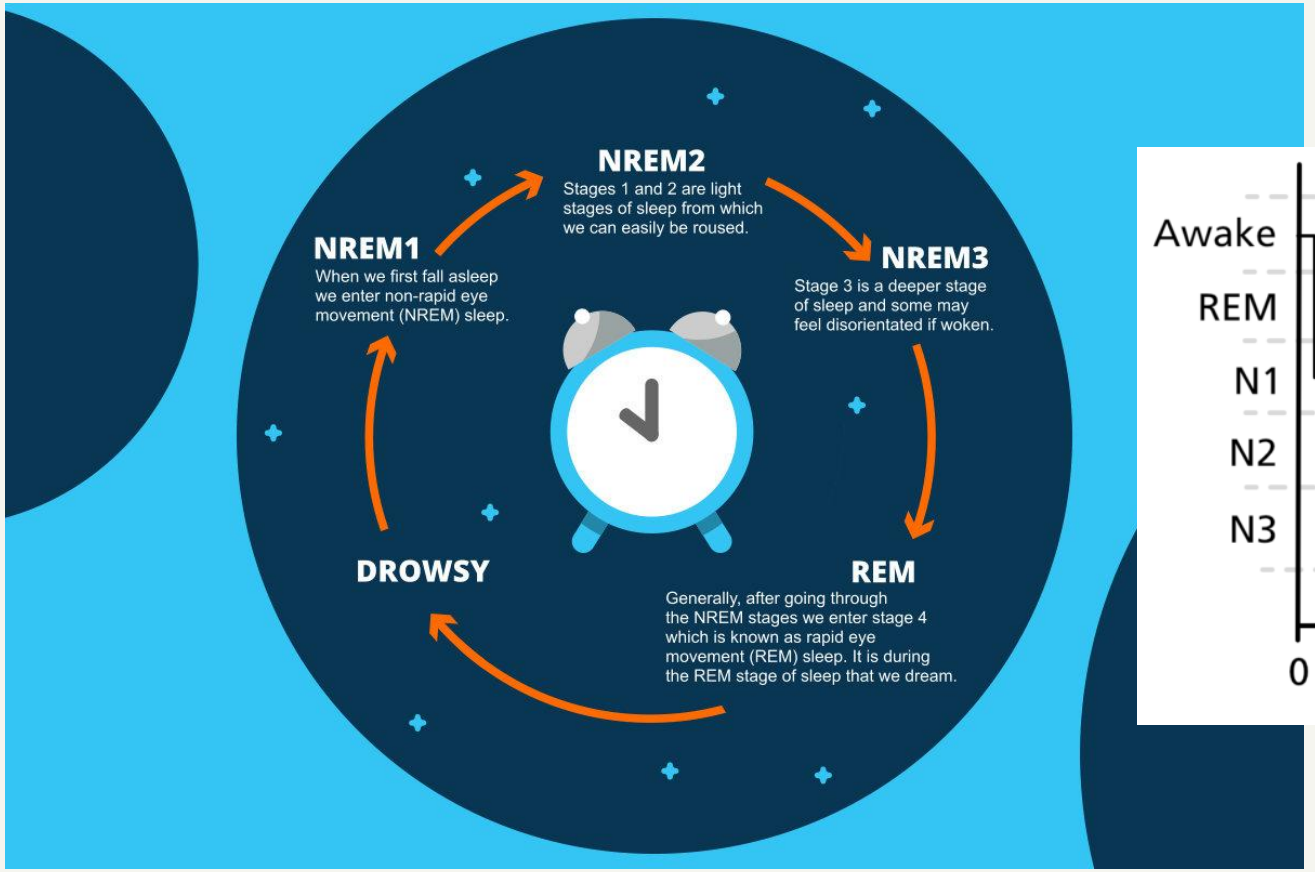
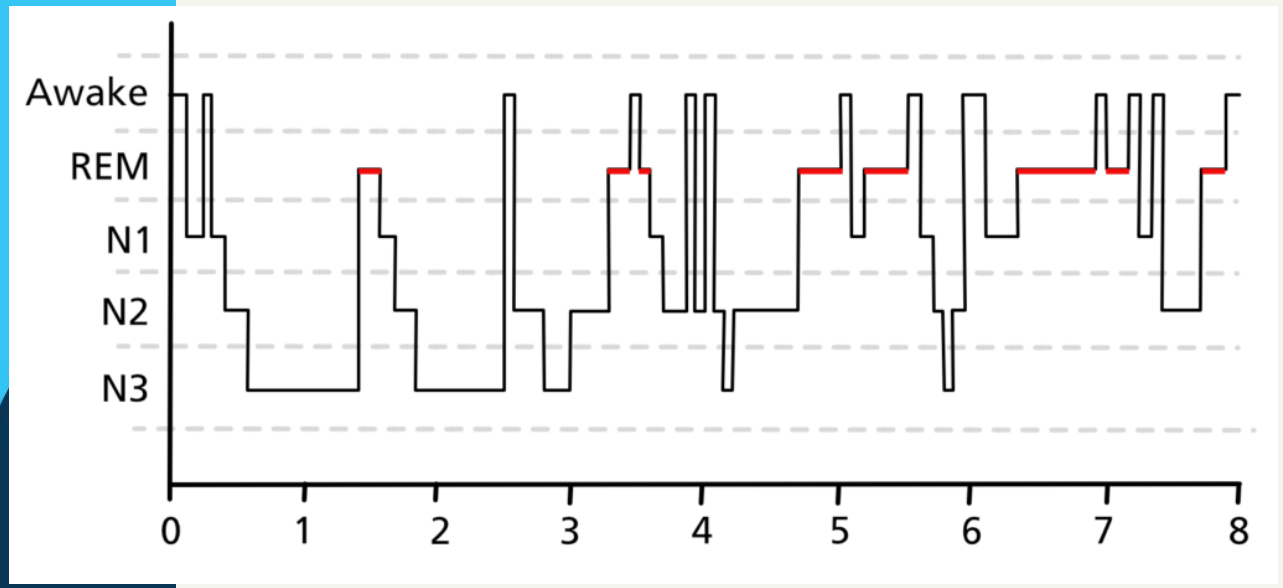
Sleep stages



[Why Do You Keep Waking Up At 3am? - The Sleep Charity]

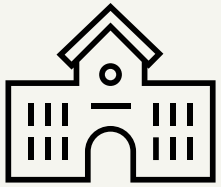


[What happens when we sleep? | Oxford Health CAMHS]

Why is sleep so important?

Health

Focus and attention



Education

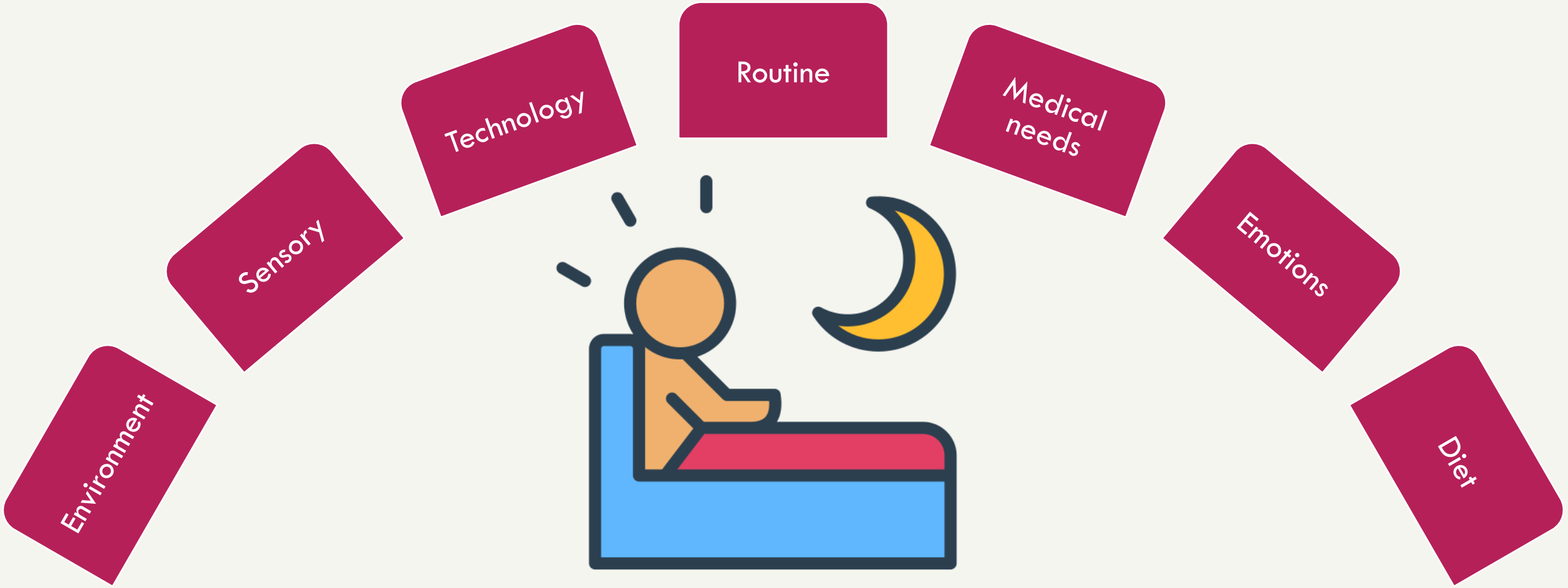
Cognition and learning

Emotional wellbeing

Family and relationships

What challenges do you face with your child's sleep?

Neurodiversity and sleep challenges



Sleep diary

A tool to help identify patterns and possible causes of sleep difficulties

The-Sleep-Charity-Childrens-Sleep-Diary.pdf

SLEEP DIARY

CHILD'S NAME

CHILD'S AGE

START DATE:	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
Time they woke up in the morning							
Any naps during the day? Please note time and duration							
Time bedtime routine started							
Time the child was in bed							
Did you stay or did they self settle?							
What time did they go to sleep at?							
Times they woke up in the night/how long were they awake/where did they go back to sleep? Your bed/their bed etc							
Total number of hours sleep							

Top tips for keeping a sleep diary:

- Always keep it by your bed and record any activity immediately or you are likely to forget
- If your child sleeps elsewhere such as at a grandparent's, ask them to keep the diary too. Mark on the diary which these nights are so that it is clear when they were in a different sleep environment
- Complete the diary accurately, record every time they wake up
- If you need more space, you can photocopy the diary to enlarge it
- Try to keep the diary at a time when life is typical, avoid holidays such as Christmas time

Strategies to support

- Routines
- Relaxation
- Meeting sensory needs
- Good sleep environment
- Supporting emotional wellbeing
- Diet and exercise
- Seeking professional help/advice

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Routine and relaxation – some principles

- Same time each day
- Predictable routine.
- Sleep routines include the time you wake up in the morning.
- Avoid screens
- Choose calming activities that encourage connection.
- Consider introducing an evening snack time but avoid high sugar or caffeine.
- Dim lights and close curtains (to support melatonin production)

Remember all children are different so finding a routine that works for your child may take time.

If you want to move your child's bedtime, earlier try moving your bedtime routine by 15 minutes every 3 nights until you reach the desired bedtime.

Bedtime Routines - The Sleep Charity

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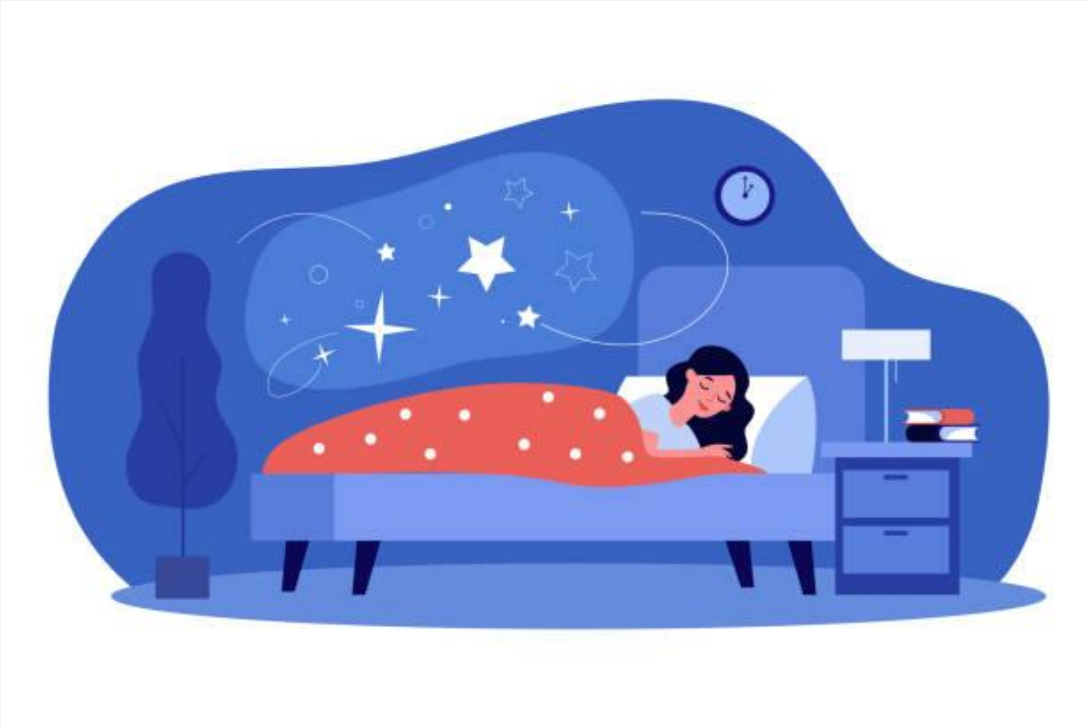
Meeting sensory needs

Environment

- Lighting
- Technology
- Distraction
- Clutter
- Noise
- Smells
- Colours
- Temperature



Emotional wellbeing

REDUCING ANXIETY, WORRIES AND FEARS

MINDFULNESS AND GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

BREATHING EXERCISES

SUPPORTING RELAXATION

Exercise

- Exercise can help your child to sleep but is often best to do a couple of hours before bed as sometimes exercising too close to bedtime can have the opposite effect to what we want.
- Exercise doesn't always mean sporting activities, playing outside or going for a walk can be helpful.

Exercise and Sleep - The Sleep Charity

Diet

- Try to avoid foods and drinks containing caffeine and sugars close to bed. Drinks like hot chocolate are generally high in caffeine so best to be avoided.
- Adding in a small evening snack of certain foods can really help aid sleep. Slow releasing carbohydrates, diary and some fruits can be helpful in ensuring children are not hungry and aid sleep.

Diet & Sleep - The Sleep Charity

Seeking professional help/ support

- GP
- School-age Healthy Family Support Practitioners
- ECFWS Hub drop-ins
- School nurse
- National Sleep Helpline - The Sleep Charity

  0330 353 0541

Resources

Home| The Sleep Charity

Children's Sleep eBook| The Sleep Charity

Children with SEND| The Sleep Charity

Neurodiversity | Essex Family Forum (see pages 122-125)

Getting a good night's sleep | Great Ormond Street Hospital

Autism & Sleep| Just One Norfolk

Understanding and supporting sleep difficulties (video)| Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Trust

Sleep for neurodivergent children and young people| Bedfordshire and Luton NHS

Sleep Support| Kids

Home| Teen Sleep Hub

The Rabbit Who Wants to Fall Asleep: A New Way of Getting Children to Sleep, Ehrlin, Carl-Johan Forssén, Maununen, Irina

- The resources listed on this slide have been collated by the EPINS Team of Neurodiversity Inclusion Facilitators to support the work they are doing with schools.
- The information offered is suggestions for further reading and these are not endorsed or recommended by Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Services or HCRG Care Group Ltd.

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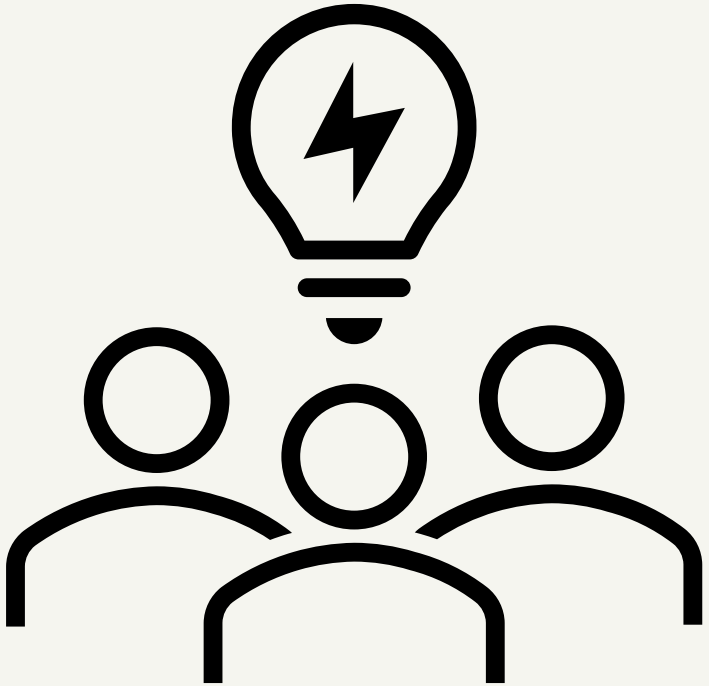
What will you take away from today's workshop?

Start	Continue & improve
Consider	Stop

Routine and relaxation



What makes a good bedtime routine?

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Developed by:
Ellie Day, Bekki Bibko and Rebecca Dadds- February 2025

EssexPINS@hcrgcaregroup.com

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