



Papillon House Therapy Newsletter

Spring Term 2026

Our therapy newsletter this term is focused on **sleep and bedtime routines**. This can be a big issue for our pupils as many Autistic children and young people experience difficulties falling asleep, staying asleep, and/or waking up refreshed.

These sleep issues often relate to sensory processing differences, as well as transition difficulties, difficulty without routines, anxiety, or motor planning challenges affecting bedtime self-care.

Some examples of these difficulties are:

- Hypersensitivity to light, sound, or touch. The bedroom may feel uncomfortable due to this.
- Difficulty winding down due to sensory-seeking behaviours.
- Challenges with transitioning from stimulating evening activities to a calm bedtime routine.

Sensory considerations for the bedroom

Sensory integration and processing plays a major role in sleep. Autistic children and young people often struggle with processing the sensory world around them. Some OT strategies can support with this, including:

- Calming strategies: using soft fabrics, or gentle pressure to support calming proprioceptive input.
- Pre-bed sensory routines: warm bath, massage, slow rocking backwards and forwards, or deep pressure stretches to help the nervous system down regulate.

Creating a sensory-friendly and healthy sleep environment can also be achieved through:

- Reducing visual stimulation (dim lighting, blackout curtains).
- Minimising auditory input (white noise, soft music).
- Considering tactile sensitivities (avoid scratchy sheets, tags, or seams).
- Considering calming scents (e.g. lavender). *Balms are often better than oils.*
- Having a cooler temperature in the room.
- Having neutral colours in the room.



How can the OT team help?

The OT team can work with you to discuss your child's sensory needs and advise on sensory equipment appropriate for your child or other strategies to support you and your child at bedtime. The OT team can also discuss nighttime toileting needs.

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Autistic children and young people often benefit from consistent and predictable routines.

Bedtime routine

Creating a bedtime routine should include:

- The same bedtime and wake-up time every day.
- Clear, visual bedtime schedule.
- Gradual transition activities before bed (e.g., quiet play, reading, dim lights).

General tips for improving sleep quality and quantity.

Limit screen time before bed (at least an hour)

Limit caffeine before bed (including fizzy drinks)

Avoid large meals before bed

How can the SaLT team help?

The SaLT team can work with you to provide visual timetables for a bedtime routine, these can be in the form of a visual strip, a now-next board or a timetable.

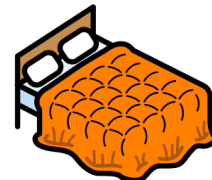


The SaLT team can also provide social stories for specific bedtime needs if necessary.

Please speak to your speech therapist regarding any visual supports needed.

Practical tips!

- Keep a sleep diary: track bedtime, wake time, night waking, sensory triggers, and calming strategies that work.
- Introduce one change at a time to avoid overwhelming your child. *Small consistent changes are key.*
- Celebrate small successes to reinforce positive routines.
- Using sensory equipment can assist with sleep such as weighted blankets and compression sheets. *Please seek advice from your OT if you feel like one of these may benefit your child.*
- If the changes feel too big try breaking them into smaller steps e.g. instead of removing screens, look at the videos your child is watching. Try to encourage calming videos before bed.



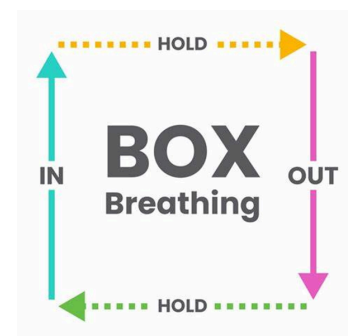
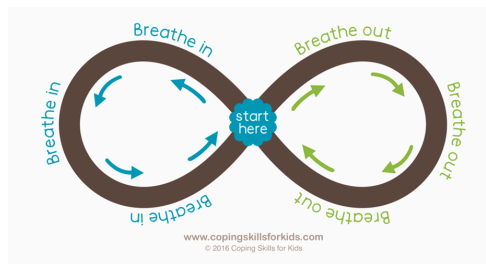
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Alongside the sensory integration and processing issues related to sleeping, a lot of Autistic children and young people might experience bedtime anxiety.

Bedtime anxiety can refer to being worried around a parent or caregiver leaving them, or can refer to more general worries. Below are some techniques to help with these scenarios.

General anxiety at night

- Deep Breathing (Figure of eight breathing, box breathing etc.)
- Schedule 'worry time' before bed or during the day so they can talk about anything that might be bothering them.
- Progressive muscle relaxation - mindfulness.
- Regular exercise during the day.



Separation anxiety at night

- Provide a safe, comfort item - a stuffed toy, blanket or item of clothing that smells like you.
- Gradual 'fading' of presence at bedtime.
- Brief check-ins throughout the bedtime routine/whilst falling asleep.
- Maintain bedtime routines.

More information available at: thesleepcharity.org.uk a website to help with sleep, they also have a support number to call.

<https://eric.org.uk/childrens-bladders/bedwetting/>

<https://bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support/a-whole-person-approach/sleep-for-neurodivergent-children-and-young-people/>