

Sheffield Children's NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Pre-bedtime activities

Parents and carers spending time with their child engaging in activities that use their fine motor skills (precision movements with their hands, and fingers) is a good way to start the bedtime routine.

Quiet activities that use both the hands and eyes together help children's brains and bodies become calm and relax in preparation for sleep.

Quiet activities

It is important that the activities are motivating and ones that they enjoy. Remember all children are different and what one child finds relaxing and calming, another child may not. Creating a quiet activities menu will help them choose less stimulating activities before bed. These activities may include:

- jigsaws
- building blocks
- posting shapes and threading beads
- doodling and colouring
- cutting and sticking pictures of their favourite characters
- play dough or craft activities

Sleepy box

Make a special box to keep just for pre-bedtime activities. This can help to encourage children to switch off TV, tablets and so on.

> Let your child personalise a box with a lid, decorate it with pens, or craft things, they may wish to write their name on it too. Once complete, talk about quiet activities that they may like to do in that first part of their routine.

Maybe add a few surprise things that you've thought about too. Explain this box can only be used at bed time and keep to that rule. Keep it fresh and interesting by adding extra items from time to time.

Most children really look forward to getting their box out and sharing this special time with you.

It may help to have relaxing music or nursery rhymes on in the back ground whilst playing.

Some children may be more interested in playing with objects like coasters or pegs and this can be encouraged if safe to do so. If your child's concentration span is short then they may play with several toys or items for short periods. This is a normal part

of their development.

Play dough

Play dough can be a good activity to aid relaxation prior to bedtime. It has therapeutic qualities and can be squashed and squeezed to release tension. Depending on age, it may be fun to add items in play dough for your child to find and sort, such as glow sticks and toy animals.

Recipe

- 2 cups of plain flour
- Half a cup of salt
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 2 heaped teaspoons of cream of tartar
- 2 cups of boiling water
- Optional — food colouring, lavender oil (must be child safe) and glitter may be added.

Children can help measure the dry ingredients. It's better to use the same size cup or mug.

Add the dry ingredients to a bowl. You then make a hollow in the middle and add the oil and boiling water—add 1 cup first and mix. Add a little at a time of second cup as it may not require the full amount (if using colouring add to the water). Mix until it comes together.

Allow the play dough to cool for a couple of minutes until warm to touch before giving it to children. Children can help to kneed well. If it is too dry, add a little more water. If it is if too sticky add more flour. If stored in an air tight container in the fridge, it will last for weeks.

Remember, children do not have to make anything, they may just wish to squash and squeeze it.

Things to remember

Avoid physical activities that can increase the heart rate or wake children up such as jumping on a trampoline, dancing and running around.

Activities should be for pleasure. Avoid school related activities or competitive games as these can raise stress levels.

Disclaimer

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