

# Sleep - A Guide for Schools



# Supporting Children Through Healthy Sleep

Sleep is one of the most powerful foundations of wellbeing for both children and adults. This guide is designed to help school staff support pupils with compassion, structure, and practical strategies.

## Why Sleep Matters

Many adults and young people are not getting the sleep they need. When sleep is compromised, everything from mood to learning becomes harder. Supporting healthy sleep rhythms can make a significant difference to a child's confidence, behaviour and ability to learn.

Research tells us that sleep impacts almost every part of our wellbeing. Many UK adults and children are not getting enough sleep:

- 14% of UK adults average less than five hours a night
- 71% of adults don't reach the recommended 7-9 hours
- Over a third of primary-aged children fall short of their 9-11 hour recommendation
- Only 25% of teens get their recommended 8-10 hours
- Over 95% of teens say nighttime phone use disrupts their sleep

## Understanding Sleep

Different ages need different amounts of sleep:

- **Primary-aged children (4-11):** 9-11 hours
- **Secondary-aged pupils (11-18):** 8-10 hours
- **Adults:** 7-9 hours

There are also different types of sleep that all play an important role:

- **Deep sleep** - supports physical recovery
- **REM sleep** - supports emotional processing and memory
- **Light sleep** - helps the body transition between sleep stages

Even if the time in bed is long enough, poor-quality sleep can still leave children tired.

# Immediate Actions Schools Can Take

Just as with supporting a child through grief or separation anxiety, clear routines and trusted relationships make a difference.

## **Assign a Trusted Adult**

Identify a key adult in school who the child can go to for support when needed. A familiar face and consistent presence make a huge difference.

## **Acknowledge Difficulties**

If a pupil is struggling due to lack of sleep, use calm, clear language: acknowledging what they're experiencing helps them feel understood and safe.

## **Communicate with Parents/ Carers**

Coordinate with parents/carers to ensure a consistent and supportive approach between home and school. Share observations about tiredness or concentration. Work together to encourage healthy routines at home.



# How You Can Help at School

- **Read the Sleep Relatable Story** with the child and work through the reflective questions together.
- Share **Happy Breathing** to help pupils reset
- Arrange for a trusted adult to check in with the child daily, using the **myHappymind Places** resource to guide the conversation and introduce strategies the child can use when they're feeling tired to help pupils reflect on how their bodies and emotions are feeling.
- Use the **visual timetable resources** to maintain routine where possible, as this provides a sense of security and allows the child to see how their day will look and to prevent them feeling overwhelmed.
- Create a “calm corner” where the child can go to self-regulate and reset when needed. Support them by displaying the Happy Breathing Posters to help focus their mindset. If an iPad or tablet is available, consider **downloading the myHappymind Parent App** so the child can access the Happy Breathing audio clips, which may be especially helpful for those who respond better to listening.
- Recommend using the **Sleep Routine Checklist printable resources** for the parents, children and use the sleep checklist on the Parent App.
- Read our **Sleep Relatable Story** and support children to create their own sleep routine checklist.
- If the child's sleep is significantly impacting their daily life or their emotions are becoming increasingly difficult to manage, consider referring them to external support such as a school counsellor, Sleep Clinic or their GP.

These strategies help children feel safe and grounded, which is particularly important when sleep has been disrupted.

# Support for Primary Pupils

Younger children may show tiredness through:

- Emotional outbursts
- Difficulty focusing
- Forgetfulness

Schools can help by:

- Encouraging predictable routines
- Limiting stimulating activities late in the afternoon
- Supporting gentle transitions between activities

# Supporting Adults in School

Sleep is vital for staff too. Even small changes can make a difference:

- A consistent bedtime and wake-up time
- No screens 1 hour before bed
- Happy Breathing or mindfulness before sleep
- Reducing alcohol, nicotine and caffeine

A well-rested adult community is better able to support children.

# Practical Next Steps

Choose three strategies to try, for yourself, your pupils or your wider school community. Examples include:

- Encouraging consistent routines
- Establishing wind-down time
- Reducing screens before bed
- Using myHappyMind calming tools

Teaching children how to sleep well may be one of the most important lifelong skills we provide.



**If you have any questions, just get in touch with your Customer Happiness Manager, or contact us at [hello@myhappymind.org](mailto:hello@myhappymind.org) or 01625 447547.**



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