

CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING YOUR YOUNG PERSON'S SLEEP

Psychology in Schools Team

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

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What age is your child(ren)?

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What stage are you at?

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What presentation are you interested in today?

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How would you rate your current knowledge of sleep differences in neurodivergent children?

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How would you rate your current confidence supporting your neurodivergent child(ren) with sleep?

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Today's workshop



What we won't be covering in detail today:

- Managing emotions at bedtime
- Communicating with teenagers about sleep

Supporting your Child or Adolescent with Sleep

Supporting Younger Children with Sleep

- The science of sleep
- Factors that affect sleep
- Sleep and neurodivergence
- Tools for sleep
- The sleep environment
- Bedtime routine and using visuals
- Medication

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What are you worried about with your child's sleep?

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How do your child's sleep affect you as a family?

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Why do we need sleep?

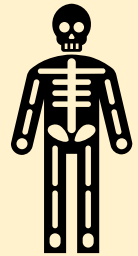
- Sleep is restorative
- It is important for:
  - Learning and memory
  - Concentration
  - Regulation



- It helps neurodivergent children recover from sensory demands and supports emotional regulation

- Neurodivergent children may sleep fewer hours and have fragmented sleep

The Science of Sleep: Our Body Clock

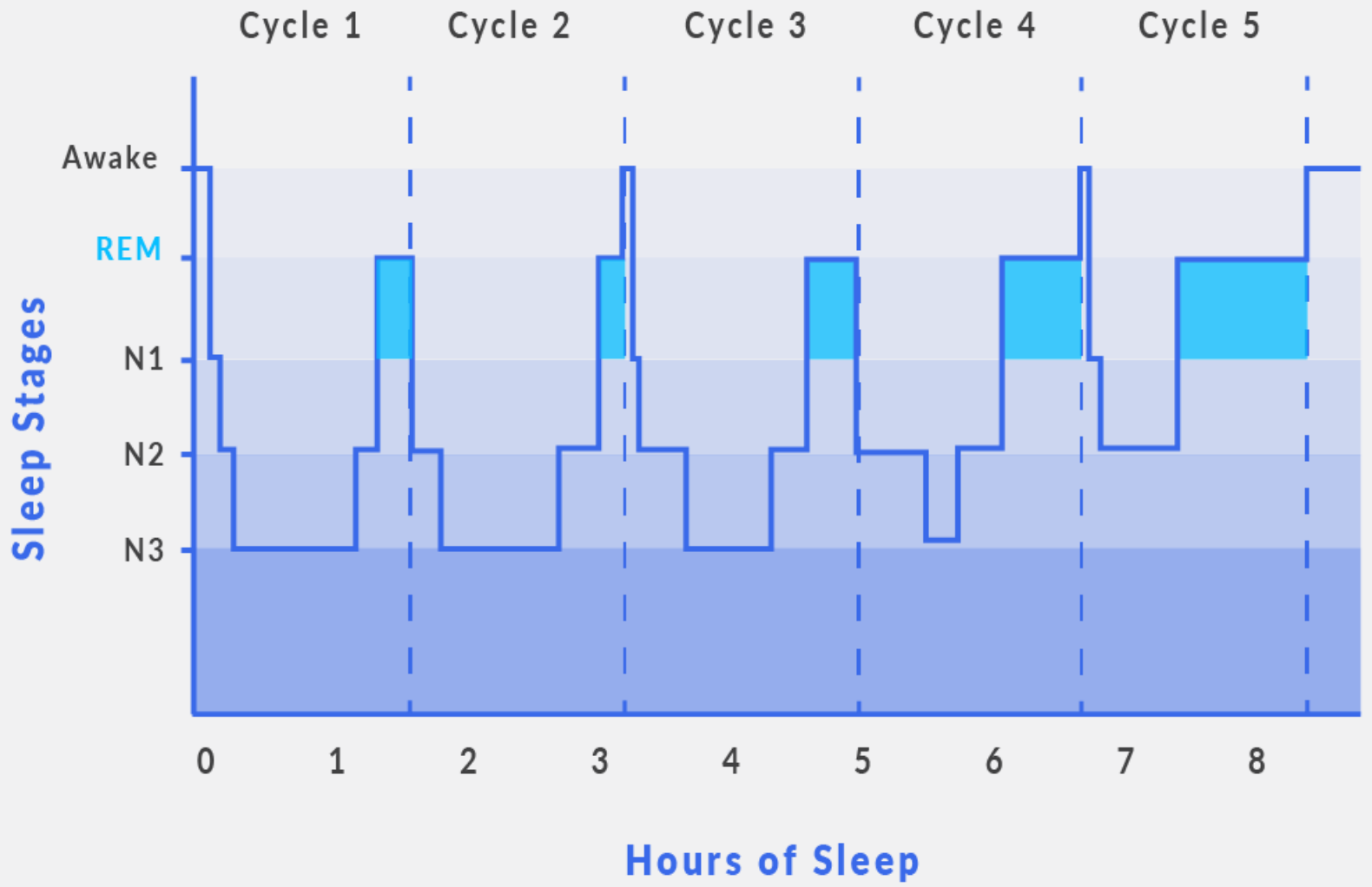




- Two systems work together to regulate when we are awake and asleep:
  - Circadian rhythm
  - Homeostasis
- Sleep pressure – we can't put more effort into sleep, we need to need it!
- How much sleep we need varies
- Aligns routines with your child's natural rhythms



The Structure of Sleep



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What factors affect your child's sleep?

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Factors that affect sleep



Emotions



Adolescence



Food & drink



Alerting activities



Light



Environment

[Supporting your Child or Adolescent with Sleep]

[Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting your child with anxiety]

Sleep and ADHD

- **Compared to neurotypical peers, children with ADHD may experience:**
  - **Shorter total time asleep**
  - **Longer time to fall asleep after 'lights out'**
  - **Have a later bedtime**
  - **Sleepier during the day**
  - **More disturbed sleep**

- **Predictable routines that include sensory input can help prepare children for sleep**

Review by Marten et al. (2023)



Sleep and Autism

- Autistic children compared to neurotypical peers may experience:
  - Shorter total sleep time
  - Longer time to fall asleep after ‘lights out’
  - Resisting going to bed
  - More likely fear of darkness
- The percentage of autistic children who have sleep problems is estimated between 47-83%.
- Visual schedules or bedtime social stories and sensory input can help.



Liang et al. (2023); Kim et al. (2023); Carnett et al. (2020)

Helping your child with sleep



- Tools for sleep
- The sleep environment
- Bedtime fading and using visuals
- Medication
- Example situation and advice

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What helps your child with sleep?

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Tools for sleep

Regular sleep/wake cycle	**Calming bedtime routine, and wake up routine**	**Be mindful of the caffeine consumption**
Avoid alerting activities just before bed	**Gap between eating & drinking and bedtime**	**Don’t lie in bed awake for long periods of time**

Previous workshop recordings you might find useful:

Social Media and the Impact on our Teenagers' Mental Health - Parent workshop

Childhood Neurodiversity: The Benefits and Problems with Using Technology

Sleeping environment



- Comfortable bed



- Noise



- Lighting



- Smell



- Temperature





- Comforting items



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Can you think of one positive adaptation you could make to your child's sleep environment?

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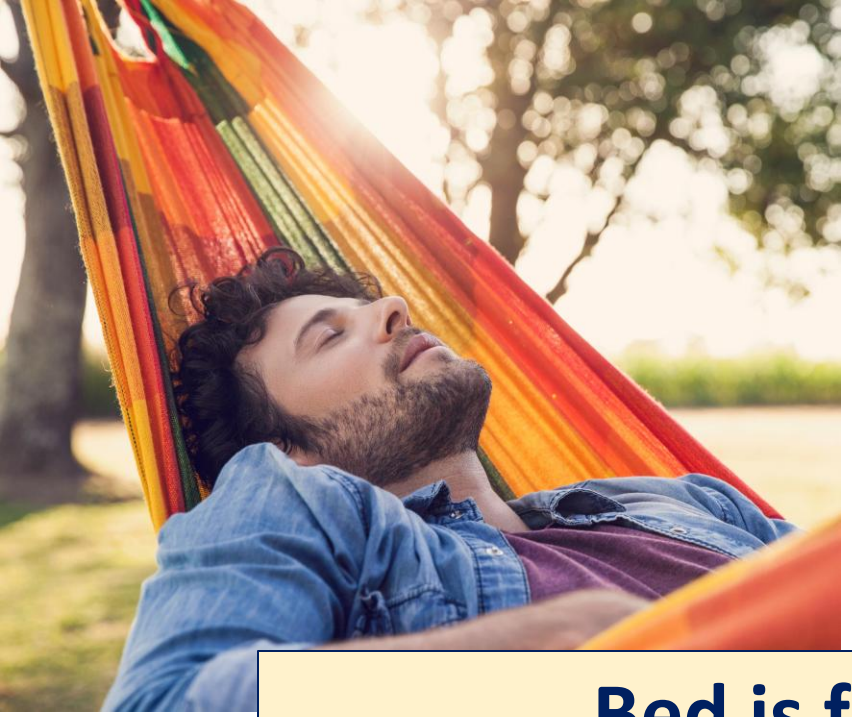
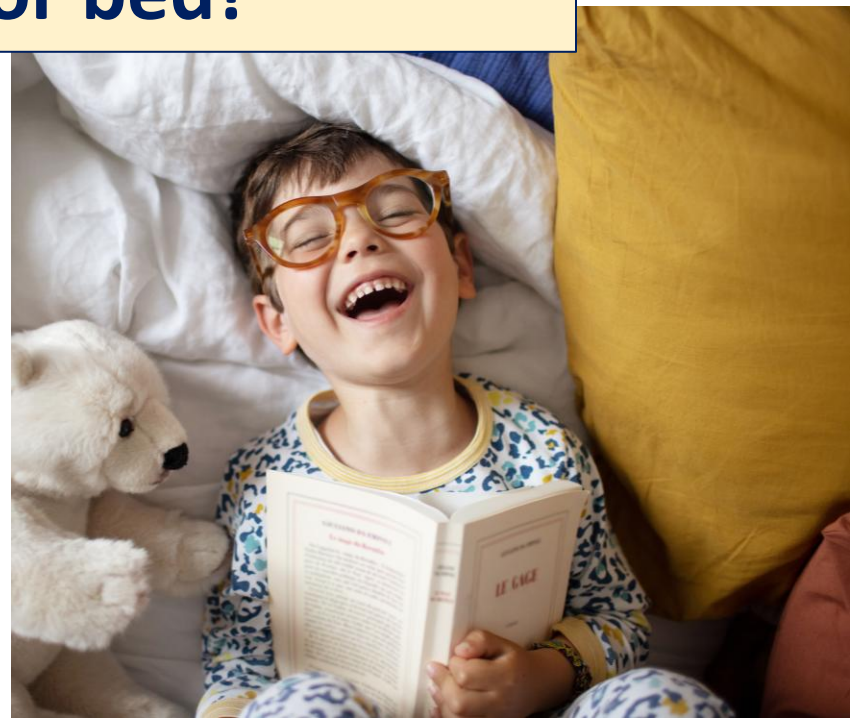




Bed is for sleeping, sleeping is for bed!





Bedtime fading

Identify a bedtime at which your child falls asleep within 15 mins

Gradually set their bedtime earlier and earlier until you reach the ideal bedtime

Keep wake time fixed

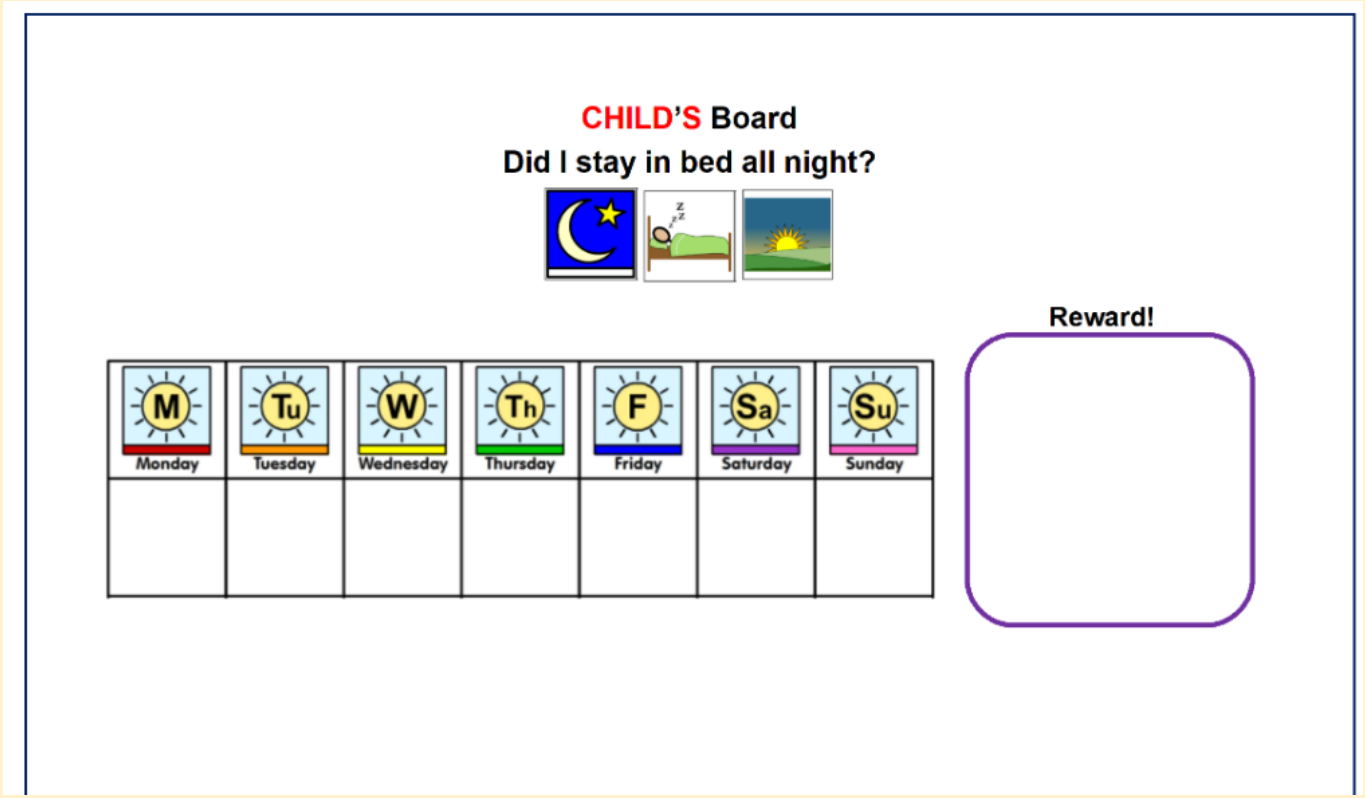
Don’t allow sleep at other times!

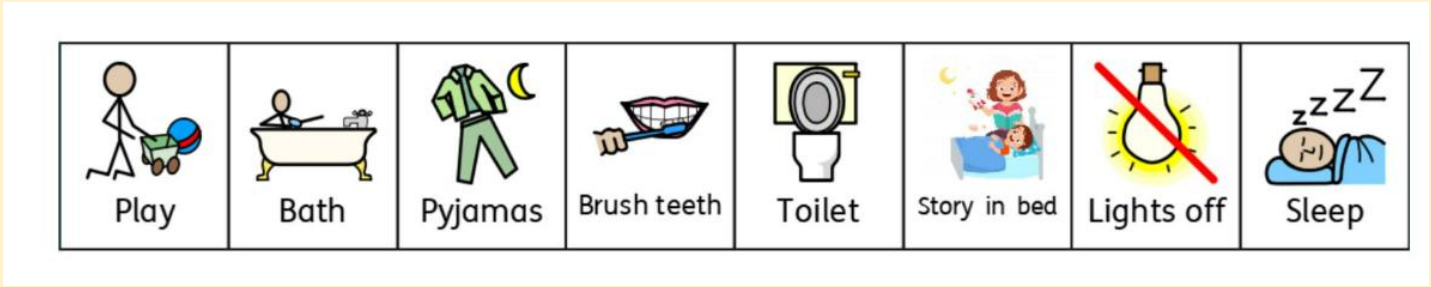


15 minutes

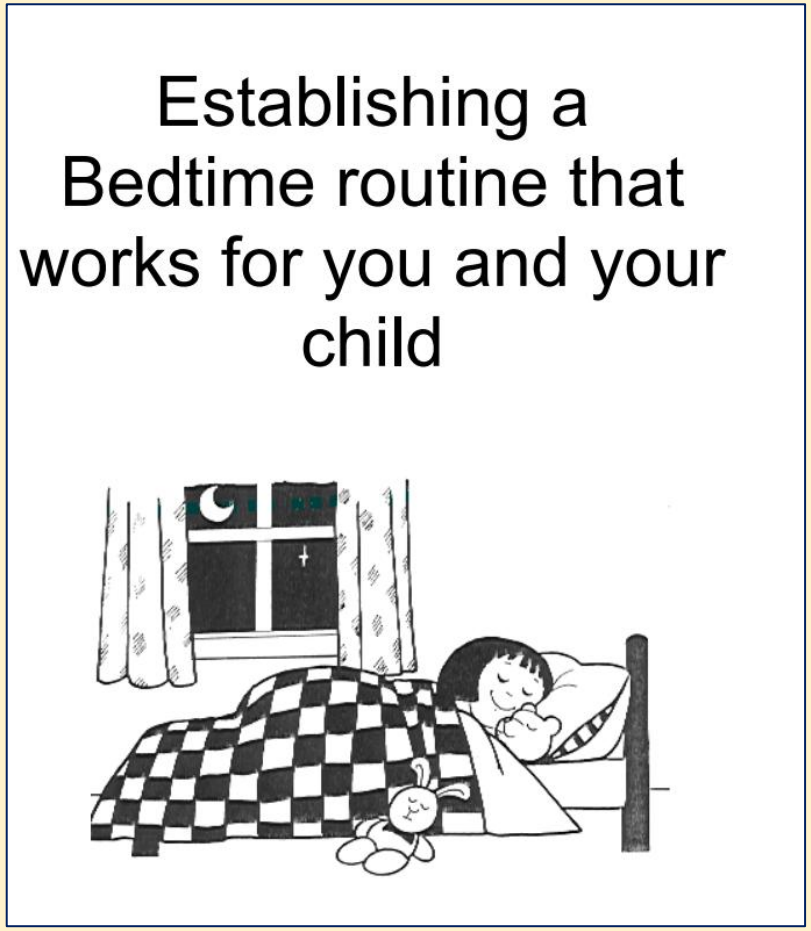
Ensure this process is collaborative with teenagers!

Using visuals to support bedtime routines





[Sleep resources - Suffolk County Council]



Medication

- Melatonin medication can be prescribed by a medical professional as a short-term intervention for significant sleep disorders.
- **Melatonin should not be given to children or adolescents without a prescription.**
- For children taking medication for ADHD, healthy sleep behaviour advice is recommended first, before considering adjusting medication to support with sleep.



Night wakings

- Night wakings are common for ND children
- Some children need support to resettle
- This may be due to sensory or emotional reasons
- Go through the wind down/bedtime routine again
- Support them to use what they need to fall back to sleep



➢Comfort items may be beneficial



➢Sensory input



➢Check the environment

This can be tough for parents managing their own broken sleep and responding to their child's needs



Example: Sam

Sam is an autistic teenage girl who struggles to get to sleep. At night, the cars outside sound too loud and there's a streetlight by her window that is too bright. The bed gets hot, but opening the window makes everything too loud. Sam feels on edge but also worn out, so she distracts herself with TikTok related to her interests in art and animals. People talking in the videos give Sam a warm feeling of having friends in the room. She keeps scrolling, then suddenly its 2am and she still feels just as alert as when she got into bed.



Example: Sam

Suggestions:

- ‘Wind down’ routine in the evening linked to interests
- Consider the position of her bed in the room
- Blackout blinds/ eye mask
- Lighter duvet or use blankets/sheets to reduce the temperature
- Only getting into bed when sleepy
- Listen to a podcast or music instead of watching TikTok



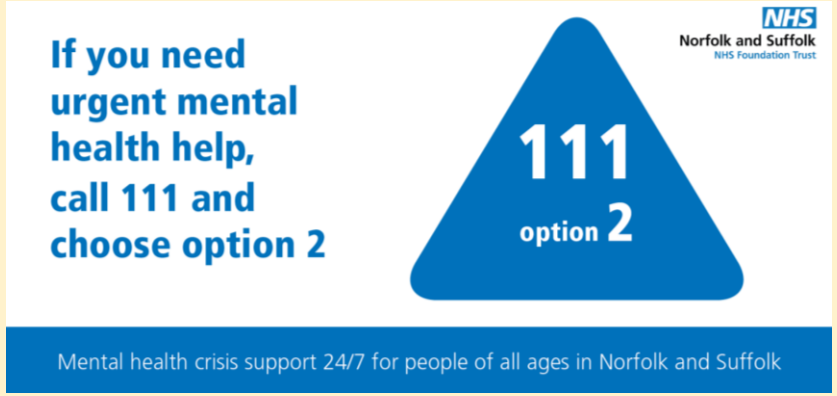
KEY RESOURCES IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR YOUNG PERSON

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/
- **Psychology in Schools Parent**

Workshop: Understanding Self Harm in Children/Adolescents

Understanding Self-Harm in Children/Adolescents (youtube.com)

- **NHS for urgent mental health support call 111, option 2 crisis support**
- **Samaritans (free 24/7): Call 116 123**
- **Shout (free 24/7): Text SHOUT to 85258**
- **Emergency: Call 999 or go to A&E**
- MIND urgent help



Further Resources





Further resources

- Soluna by Kooth
- Sleep and mental health – Mind
- **The Sleep Charity** website www.thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/
- **The Teen Sleep Hub** Free eBook download about sleep information and advice. https://teensleephub.org.uk/
- **National Sleep Helpline 03303 530 541** National Sleep Helpline - The Sleep Charity confidential service available Mon/Tue/Thurs evening 7-9pm and Mon/Wed morning 9-11am.

Suffolk support

- Sleep resources - Suffolk County Council Psychology and Therapeutic Services webpage free resources about sleep for children, young people and families.
- Learning disabilities - Suffolk County Council Sleep resources shared in a previous slide
- Barnardo's Phoneline for advice on emotional wellbeing – call 0345 600 2090 option 2
- Recovery College: Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS

CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY WORKSHOP PROGRAMME: FUTURE AND RECORDED WORKSHOPS



Future Workshops

Childhood Neurodivergence: Understanding and Supporting Eating Difficulties (8th December 12.30pm)

Recorded Workshops

Childhood Neurodivergence: Supporting Your Child's Social Relationships

Childhood Neurodivergence: Understanding and Supporting Sensory Needs

Childhood Neurodivergence: Navigating the Diagnosis Journey

Childhood Neurodivergence: Supporting your Child with Anxiety

Childhood Neurodivergence: What You Need to know as a parent/carer

Childhood Neurodivergence: Supporting Planning, Organising and Remembering

www.nsft.uk/workshops Psychology in Schools Team Eventbrite page

Psychology In Schools: Free Live Workshops And Video Recordings

Upcoming LIVE Parent/Carer workshops on mental health

www.nsft.uk/workshops Eventbrite

Recorded previous mental health workshops on a range of topics:

- Anxiety, Managing Big Feelings, Emotion Based School Avoidance, Bereavement, Managing Change and Transitions, Understanding the Adolescent Brain and more!

www.nsft.nhs.uk/parent-workshops

Recovery College

Recovery College

Open to all aged 16 and above and interested in mental health recovery in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Recovery College provides free educational courses to equip you with the skills and strategies to move on with your recovery and/or to support others.

Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS

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I have found today's workshop helpful

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Two key things I will take away from this workshop are...

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One thing that I would improve about this workshop is...

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How would you rate your knowledge of sleep differences in neurodivergent children after attending this workshop?

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How would you rate your confidence supporting your neurodivergent child(ren) with sleep after attending this workshop?

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Childhood Neurodiversity: Parent/Carer Feedback Survey

