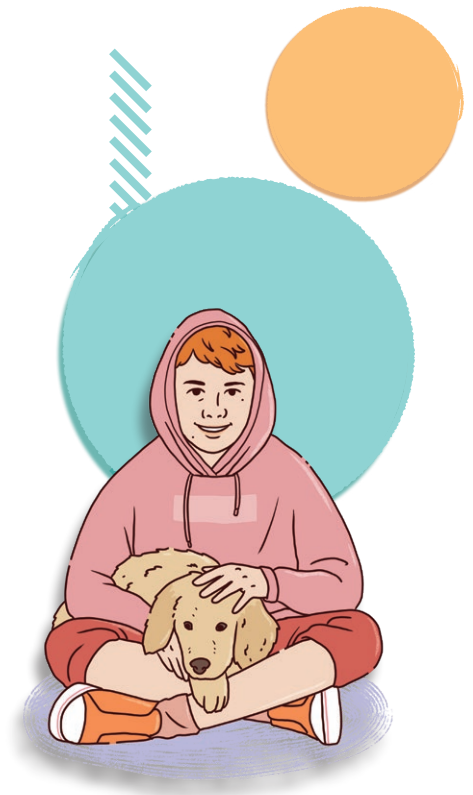


My Child Won't Sleep: A Support Snippet for Parents of Autistic Children

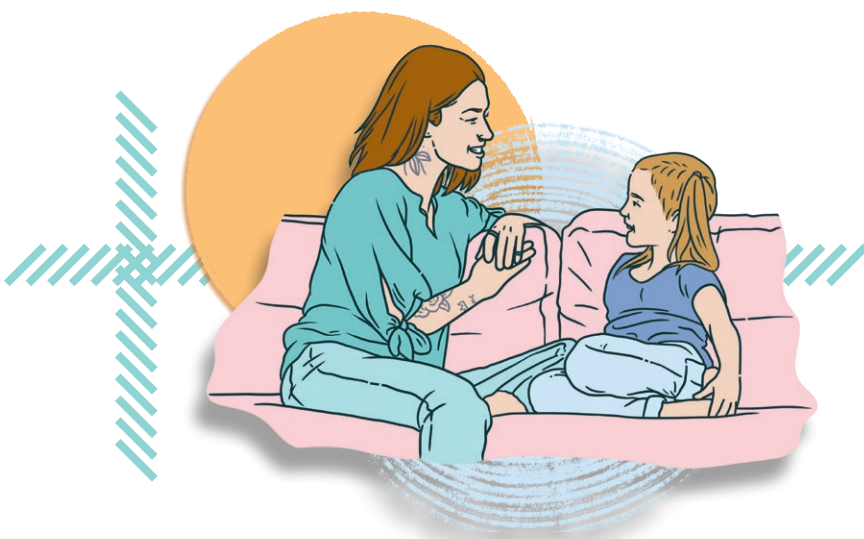
Why might Autistic children struggle with sleep?

A good night's sleep is so important for allowing our brain and body to rest and repair. However, Autistic children can struggle to get the quality sleep that they need:

- Many Autistic children can struggle with **sensory overwhelm** at nighttime. For example, their room is too hot or cold or they dislike the texture of their bedding or pyjamas.
- They may be **overstimulated** by too many distractions in their bedroom, such as toys and games.
- If an Autistic child wakes up in the middle of the night, they may struggle without **comforting strategies** (e.g. being rocked by an adult) that they rely on to get to sleep in the first place.
- They may struggle with the **transition** from daytime to nighttime and therefore take a very long time to 'wind down'.
- If an Autistic child is experiencing **stress or anxiety**, they might struggle with looping thoughts in their head. This makes it a lot more challenging to switch off.



- Some Autistic children may experience irregular secretion of **melatonin**, a sleep hormone that helps to regulate sleep-wake cycles.
- An Autistic child may struggle with **social cueing**, meaning that they don't understand the connection between nighttime and sleep.
- They may struggle with **medical issues** (e.g. constipation) that cause feelings of discomfort or pain during the night.



Signs your Autistic child is struggling with sleep:

taking a very long time to fall asleep

waking up in the night and struggling to get back to sleep again

sleeping a lot less than the recommended hours of sleep for their age

sleeping too much – can be caused by increased exhaustion if your child experiences high levels of stress

being very energetic, e.g. bouncing on their bed or playing with toys late at night

feeling anxious about their bedroom environment, e.g. if it's too hot or the lights are too bright

complaining about the feel of their clothes or bedding, e.g. if they find certain materials too 'scratchy'

feeling distressed by sounds they can hear either inside or outside their bedroom

not understanding the concept of bedtime or why they need to sleep

feeling anxious about being on their own in a room, away from you

awake at night worrying excessively about things on their mind

calling out for you frequently in the night and relying on that comfort

frequently wetting their bed at night

finding it challenging to concentrate and maintain attention during the day

experiencing nightmares and night terrors

moving their body excessively while sleeping, e.g. body-rocking or head-banging

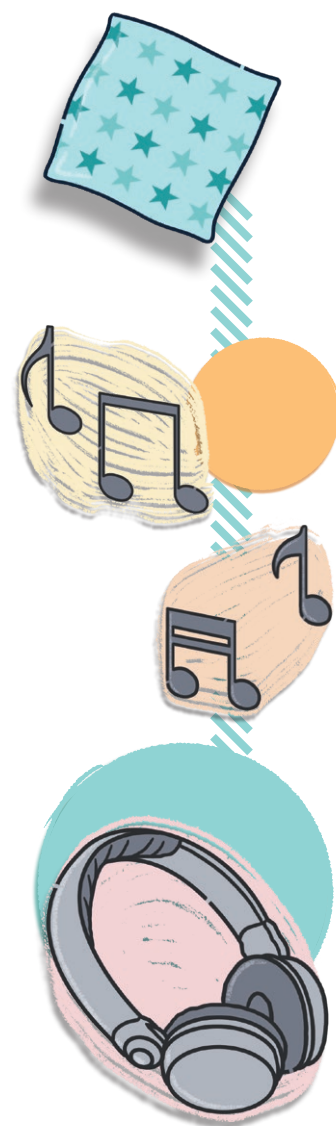
feeling tired during the day and needing to nap

increased irritability, dysregulation and hyperactivity during the daytime



Supporting your Autistic child with sleep:

- Address any sensory issues regarding texture, e.g. they may prefer to wear pyjamas made from a soft fabric, with tags removed. If your child really struggles with the texture of their pyjamas, find out what everyday clothing they prefer and that can be used as pyjamas. Pyjamas can be anything comfortable!
- Use blackout blinds and curtains to reduce light filtering into their bedroom and check that bedside lamps aren't too bright.
- Try to maintain a comfortable temperature in their bedroom.
- Reduce visual clutter in their bedroom to reduce sensory overwhelm and create a more calming environment.
- Remove any unwanted smells from their bedroom, e.g. some children can be distressed by the smell of the washing powder on bedding.
- Some children find deep pressure calming – try a weighted blanket or compression garments (only use these under guidance from your child's occupational therapist or GP).
- Try playing music, audio stories or white noise sounds to help your child settle to sleep.
- Consider the noise levels in other areas of the house – try to keep their surroundings calm and quiet.
- Let your child wear headphones at bedtime to block out stimulating noises.



- Ensure their bedroom is safe, particularly if they are active at nighttime, e.g. check the positioning of furniture to prevent climbing.
- Avoid screen time before bedtime and keep electronic devices with screens out of their room.
- Encourage calming, non-stimulating activities before bedtime such as colouring or reading books.
- Stick to a regular, predictable evening routine each day to signal to your child that it's bedtime.
- Give your child plenty of verbal reminders leading up to bedtime.
- Consider the use of visual aids at bedtime (e.g. a bedtime routine chart).

- For Autistic children who struggle with anxiety, consider the use of a daily journal to help them open up about any worries before settling for bedtime.
- Keep a sleep diary to help you identify any patterns or triggers with your child's sleep.
- Encourage plenty of physical activity during the day.
- Make sure that your child doesn't eat too close to bedtime.
- Engage in some simple breathing exercises with your child before they go to sleep, or other relaxing activities such as yoga.
- If your child routinely naps during the day, consider reducing or eliminating daytime sleep.
- Offer plenty of praise when your child has a good bedtime routine and settles to sleep.
- Reach out for professional support (e.g. by talking to a GP, paediatrician or sleep charity).
- With professional guidance, explore the possibility of giving your child melatonin supplements.



We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. This resource includes information generally found to benefit educators/parents learning more about Autism, and features content to support Autistic learners. Our resources follow guidance created after consultations with representatives from the Autistic community. Our resources use 'identity first' language. It is important to acknowledge that every learner's needs are different. Some elements of these resources may not be applicable in relation to specific Autistic learners; you will find editable alternatives on all of our Autism specific resources to enable you to edit and amend them for individual needs and preferences. Twinkl is an international company and therefore some resources may feature terminology that is appropriate in some countries but not others - in such cases, you are able to request an alternative version specific to your country's approach.

These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every learner's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your learner. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your learner.

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This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It is intended to offer general information and should never be taken as medical advice. As medical information is situation-specific and can change, we do not warrant that the information provided is correct. You and your children should not rely on the material included within this resource and we do not accept any responsibility if you or your children do. It is up to you to contact a suitably qualified health professional if you are concerned about your health or the health of your children.