

# Bedtime routine incorporating sensory strategies:

Bedtime...most parents or caretakers of young children cringe at the word. This can be one of the most frustrating times of the day for you and your child. As you know, it is crucial for your child to get an adequate amount of sleep for academic success, appropriate behavior and to start to develop functional routines for success in adulthood. As an Occupational Therapist I would suggest tapping into your child's sensory systems for some help calming them and preparing them to transition to sleep. This bypasses reasoning and/or negotiating with your child and taps into the nervous system with strategies that are naturally calming (activating the parasympathetic nervous system).

It is always helpful to have a predictable bedtime routine whenever possible. This is a transition activity (or activities) to prepare your child to sleep. Make sure you do the **SAME routine for at least 2 weeks** before deciding that the strategies do not work and changing them. Also, limit your child's TV time and excited play before bedtime (turns up the nervous system, not down).

## Typically this is **bath, book, and bed.**

Sensory strategies integrated into this routine can be very helpful, even to a normally developing child.

**Deep pressure:** This is calming to a child (like a strong hug) and can be done by snuggling firmly during book reading (no light touch or stroking, this stimulates the child and make them more alert). This can also be achieved by firmly rubbing the child's back or arms (again no light touch). The child can also achieve this themselves by wrapping themselves in a stretchy blanket during book reading or vestibular stimulation (see next section). Weighted blankets or heavy comforters can also be helpful, just be sure that your child is not getting overheated and that the blanket is not too heavy (such as one that is made for an adult). The weight of the blanket should be 5-10% of the child's body weight. Also, do not use weighted blankets on infants ever. Tucking them in is very good for deep pressure as well.

**Vestibular:** This stimulates the inner ears and can either make a child more alert or calm them. Slow rhythmic movements in a rocking chair can be very calming. This may have to be moderated by you because the child can begin rocking very fast or erratically and this can make them excited. If your child is small enough, wrap them up in a blanket and place them on your lap while reading a relaxing book.

**Olfactory:** Lavender scents can be very calming and signal to the brain that it is time to sleep.

**Auditory:** White noise machines or a fan in a child's bedroom are very helpful to block out extraneous noise and also signal to the brain that it is time to sleep.

**Warmth:** Placing the blankets/comforters in the dryer for several minutes can sooth your child and help them relax before bed.

**Visual:** An aquarium in your child's bedroom with a light may be helpful. This can also give your child some responsibilities to look forward to (feeding fish). There are many projectors that will put ocean scenes or water on the ceiling as well.

Hope this helps! Good luck!

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