

CORONAVIRUS

**THE IMPORTANCE OF
SLEEP FOR POSITIVE
MENTAL HEALTH**

Dear parent/carer

For even the most laid back of us, this is a time where it is difficult not to feel worried about the future. There is an air of uncertainty and worry at the moment, and you may have found yourself feeling increasingly stressed or consumed by worries about the future. It's understandable that these thoughts could keep your mind wired at night, preventing you from being able to fall asleep or causing you to wake up in panic during the early morning hours.

Just like food, water and air, our bodies need sleep. Sleep directly impacts our immune system and our ability to fight off infection. As you rest, you are helping to make your body whole and healthy again. Your immune system works to fight against harmful germs.

Poor sleep can have a direct impact on our mental health. When we lose sleep, our emotions can feel more intense. Our ability to regulate emotions can also become diminished, so existing stressors become more stressful, and the ability to calm down becomes more impaired.

Good sleep is the foundation for positive mental health. Everyone's individual sleep needs vary. While some may only need as little as 5 hours a night, others may need 10 hours or more. In general, however, it is recommended that teenagers sleep around 8½ - 9½ hours a night. As we get older, we might find we require a little less.

We've put together some techniques that we can all use to stop anxiety around coronavirus affecting our sleep.

The Unravel Team

The logo for 'unravel' is written in a lowercase, rounded, teal-colored font.

Experts in children & young people's
emotional well-being

Supporting you on behalf of your child's school



THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP FOR POSITIVE MENTAL-HEALTH

- ✓ If possible, bedrooms should be the place to sleep and only sleep. This signals to the brain that sleep is the goal when we go in. If our bedroom doubles up as an office, TV room or games room, our brains become confused as to its purpose. Is it to watch a film, play on the playstation or go to sleep? If you struggle to sleep, ditch all other activities in your bedroom, perhaps with the exception reading, which can help you drop off.
- ✓ Our brains work with an internal clock called the Circadian Rhythm or sleep-wake cycle. Our quality of sleep is improved when this cycle has a regular pattern. If you feel you are not getting enough sleep, try maintaining a regular sleep-wake schedule, even at the weekends. Keeping a sleep diary for the first few weeks may help you to stick to a schedule.
- ✓ Watching TV stimulates the brain and prevents it from shutting down. It puts us in the action and encourages us to follow a storyline. We know it's not real, but hormones in our bodies can react as if it is, and this keeps us alert. This is the reason why we enjoy watching TV.
- ✓ By its very nature, social media can be compulsive and difficult to switch off from. Research has suggested that the blue light emitting from phones, tablets and TVs can fool the brain into thinking it is still daytime. If you're struggling to switch off from your social media, try downloading an app that restricts your social media intake or better still, remove all screens from your bedroom.





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- ✔ Caffeine found in tea, coffee and energy drinks stimulates the brain. Whilst this may feel beneficial in the morning as it helps us become more alert, at night it can have a disruptive effect on our ability to fall asleep and can lead to insomnia. If you feel you can't get through the day without your daily intake of caffeine, try to avoid consuming it from noon onwards. Some studies have shown that caffeine can stay in your system over 6 hours after consumption.
- ✔ Like caffeine, nicotine found in cigarettes and e-cigarettes is a stimulant which causes our brains to become alert. Smokers are more likely to have disrupted sleep and develop conditions such as insomnia and sleep apnoea. If you are a smoker, for many health reasons, the advice is to stop. However, if you can't or won't quit, try to reduce your urge to smoke during the hours leading up to bedtime.
- ✔ Regular exercise improves both sleep quality and duration, allowing our bodies to become physically tired and promoting the brain to feel the same. Exercise is also a great way to release stress. If excessive stress is a factor that is keeping you awake, exercise could be the answer. There have been many studies to suggest a strong link between exercise, good sleep and good mental health.
- ✔ If you find you're getting up regularly throughout the night to go to the toilet, you might need to reduce your liquid intake during the hours before going to bed. If you do need to go, try to navigate your way to the toilet introducing as little light as possible. You don't want to signal to your brain that it is morning and time to wake up.





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- ✔ We're all partial to a late night snack from time to time. However, consuming heavy or spicy foods before bed revs up our digestive system at a time when it should be slowing down. Gravity assists your food to work down to your stomach when we eat throughout the day. This doesn't happen so well if we are lying in bed and can lead to indigestion and disrupted sleep. If possible, try to avoid eating a few hours before sleep.
- ✔ Hide your clock. There's nothing worse than watching the minutes go by when you're struggling to sleep. If you do wake up in the middle of the night, get out of bed. Go to a different room that's comfortable and quiet and engage in whatever activity you'd be doing during wind-down time, things that occupy your mind in a pleasant way but that aren't too stimulating. The goal is to make you feel sleepy again.
- ✔ It might sound a little weird, but stick with this one. While it might be a bit of pain to take a minute or two out of each morning to make your bed, it signals to you that you are important enough to set yourself up with something that you will benefit from later. It also starts your day with an orderly and productive habit which can promote other such habits. Ask the most organised and productive person you know if they make their bed; the chances are they'll say yes.
- ✔ Washing bedding regularly keeps bacteria, fungal spores, dust and dust mites at bay. Who doesn't like getting into a bed with freshly washed bedding?





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- ✔ It goes without saying, noise can have a dramatic effect on our quality of sleep. This can be problematic if you share your sleeping space with some else. If you find their sleeping habits disrupt your own sleeping needs, try to establish some bedtime ground rules that you can all agree on. Be sure to point out the health benefits to yourself and the other people involved.
- ✔ Darkness signals to the brain that it is night-time and prepares it to shut down for sleep. Trying to sleep in a light room can be problematic. This is especially so during the summer months. If possible, have a blackout blind or heavy curtains in your bedroom to eliminate as much light as possible. If not possible, use an eye mask.
- ✔ The optimum room temperature for a good night's sleep is between 15-19 degrees centigrade. Your body's temperature decreases as you fall asleep which assists the sleeping process. Feeling too hot or cold can disrupt this from happening as quickly. When it's not too cold, ventilate your room by opening a window. Sleeping under a couple of layers can help you regulate your temperature by adding or removing the top layer.
- ✔ Schedule in wind-down time. Allocate half an hour to an hour before bedtime as wind-down time. This means relaxing in a room with dim lighting and engaging in a non-stimulating activity.
- ✔ Don't catastrophise your poor sleep pattern. There's enough catastrophe outside your head. It won't help to panic over a couple of nights of lost sleep. Focus on sleep but don't obsess about it.





KEEPING A SLEEP DIARY

If you're struggling to sleep, perhaps a sleep diary is the way to go. Keeping a sleep diary can help us gain a clearer understanding of our sleep patterns and identify areas for improvements.

A sleep diary is a daily log to record your sleep-wake pattern. It aims to measure the pattern and quality of our sleep, and factors that may affect it. Whilst it may be a bit of a pain at first, the benefits of keeping a sleep diary could have a dramatic positive impact on our general well-being.

It is recommended that a sleep diary is kept for a period of two weeks in order to gain a clear understanding of the things that affect our sleep. Ideally the amount of sleep we get each night should be fairly consistent.

Making changes to our lifestyle choices can be quite tricky. Trying to change everything all at once can often feel overwhelming and lead to frustration. Start with the easiest change first, such as keeping your bedroom tidy. Once you have that under your belt, introduce another change. If you find you have let things slip and fallen on bad habits again, don't worry. These things can often take a couple of attempts to get right. You may find returning to a sleep diary might help.

If you are interested in identifying the factors that affect your own sleeping habits, please use the template at the end of this document to log of your own sleep routine.





ADDITIONAL TIPS TO HELP YOU FALL ASLEEP

- ✓ **Count sheep**

The notion that counting imaginary sheep jumping over a gate will help us fall asleep faster has been embedded in folklore for generations. The theory is that by occupying our minds with something repetitive and mundane, this induces boredom and promotes the onset of sleep. In doing so, we also distract our minds from those things that may be troubling us.
- ✓ **Take a warm shower**

Taking a warm shower one hour before going to bed and then stepping out into some cooler air will help your body temperature drop quickly, promoting the onset of sleep.
- ✓ **Scent your room with lavender**

Lavender oil is said to relax nerves, lower blood pressure and put us into a relaxed state, ready for sleep.
- ✓ **Write down your thoughts**

Our sleep is often disrupted during times of anxiety or worry. Thoughts appear to be on a continuous loop that go around and around our heads into the small hours of the morning. If you find yourself in this situation, get your thoughts out of your head and onto paper. This process effectively puts your thoughts to bed. Scientific research has also suggested that spending 5 minutes each night writing a to-do list of the things we need to do the following day can assist in the transition from wakefulness to sleep.





ADDITIONAL TIPS TO HELP YOU FALL ASLEEP

✓ **Try wearing socks in bed**

Warming hands and feet before going to bed helps dilate the blood vessels and allows for better blood circulation. Good blood circulation helps to redistribute heat throughout our bodies, regulating our body temperature and preparing us for sleep. Research has suggested that wearing socks in bed can reduce the time it takes to get to sleep by 15 minutes.

✓ **4-7-8 breathing method**

This breathing method is said to increase the amount of oxygen in our bloodstream and slow down our heart rate, releasing more carbon dioxide from our lungs.

- Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of a tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there throughout the entire exercise.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8.
- Repeat the cycle 3 more times for a total of 4 breaths.



SLEEP DIARY

MORNING RECORD

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Time I went to bed							
Time I woke up in the morning							
Time it took me to fall asleep (approximately)							
I fell asleep: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with ease • after some time • with difficulty 							
Number of times I awoke up during the night							
Total time I was asleep							
What disturbed my sleep							
Quality of sleep Rate between 1-10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 being poor • 10 being good 							
How do I feel today: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refreshed • oK • tired 							

SLEEP DIARY

EVENING RECORD

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Caffeinated drinks I have had today before 5pm							
Caffeinated drinks I have had today after 5pm							
Have I consumed any alcohol today?							
Minutes of exercise I have done today							
Did I nap at any time and for how long?							
Today I have felt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grumpy • impatient • tired • moody • unable to concentrate 							
What did my bedtime routine include							

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**TOGETHER WE CAN
BEAT IT**

**Please keep yourselves
and your children safe**

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