

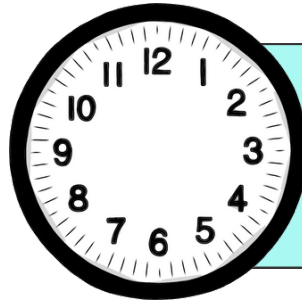
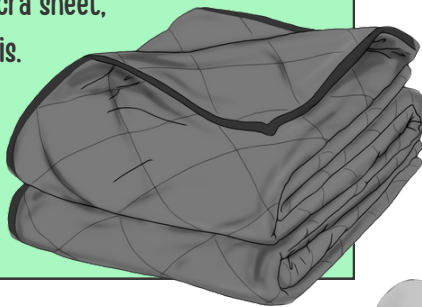
SLEEP - REGULATION FOR BEDTIME

BY CANDIA SLAUGHTER & MEL CAMPBELL

Many children can find it hard to go to bed, fall asleep and stay asleep. Perhaps their bodies take a while to calm down, they do not want to be separated from you, their fear response becomes more intense when they 'stop', or their thinking brains struggles to switch off. Bedtime can also trigger a sense of being alone. These are some ideas that may help down-regulate their bodies, brains and nervous system to support them during this time:

Try weighted blankets, a lycra sheet or tuck them in bed with sheets and a blanket. Many children like to have lots of cuddly toys on their beds. This provides them with deep pressure and supports them to feel their body when they rest. Tucking them in or using a lycra sheet, can also help with this.

Only do this if you child agrees, some children will not like this feeling.

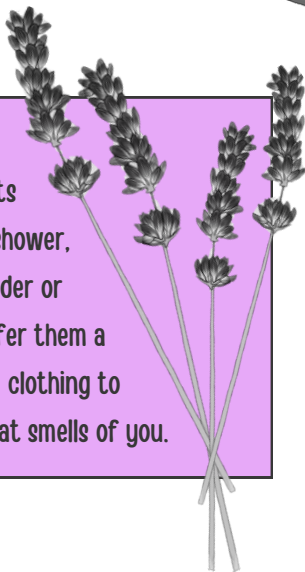


Routine: most children thrive from routines, structure and predictability. It helps them to feel safe, especially at bedtime. Whatever your routine, wherever possible, try and stick to it

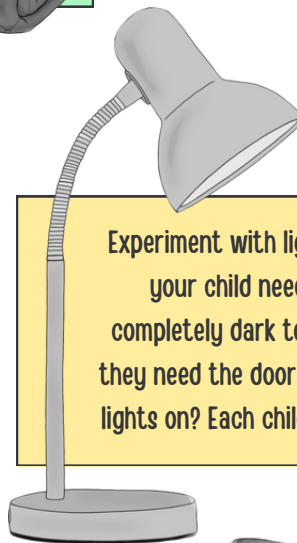
As many moments of connection and co-regulation you can offer your child during the bedtime routine will support them to shift from feelings of fear to feelings of safety. Stay near and be present.



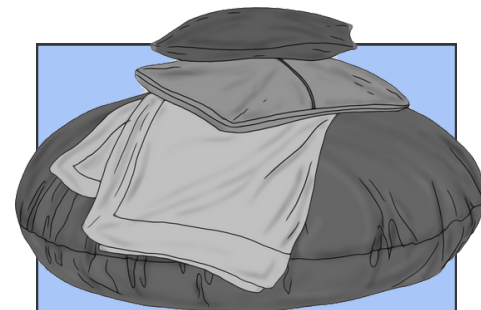
Use calming scents in a bath or shower, such as lavender or camomile. Offer them a piece of your clothing to sleep with that smells of you.



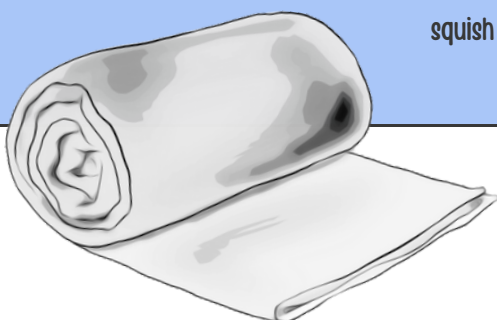
Experiment with lighting - does your child need it to be completely dark to sleep, or do they need the door open or night lights on? Each child is different.



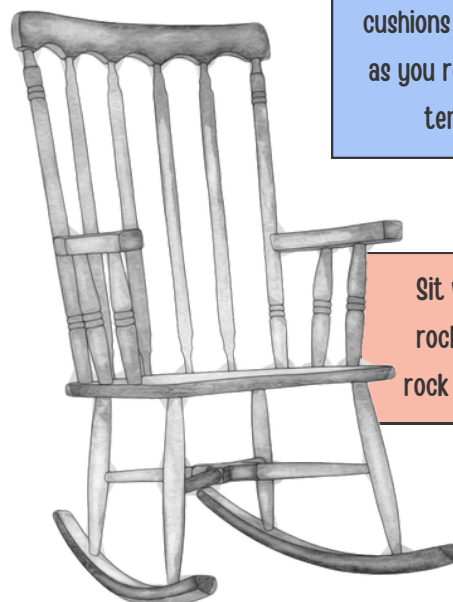
Lie together with bean bags, big cushions or weighted items on you as you read, talk or listen to slow tempo music together.



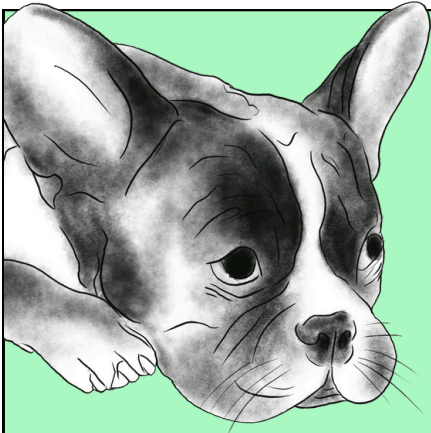
Some children may need only calming input. You can offer bear hugs, massage, rolling a gym ball over their backs and legs as they lie on their front, wrapping them up in a warm towel after a bath, shower or wash, giving them a big squish with some cushions.



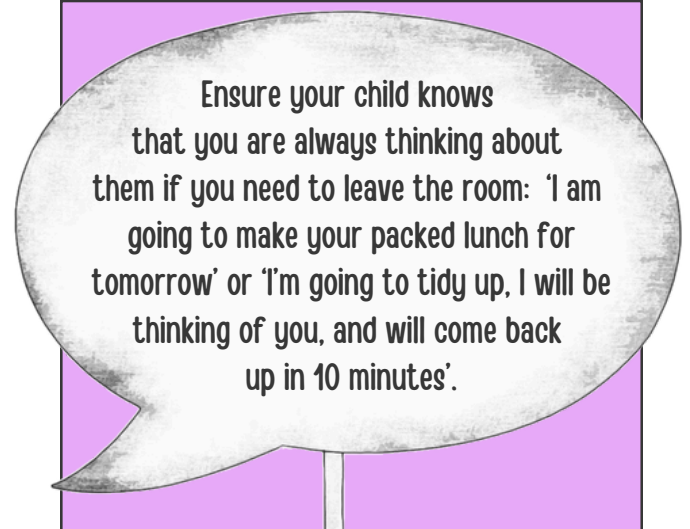
Sit with each other on a rocking chair and gently rock as you read together.



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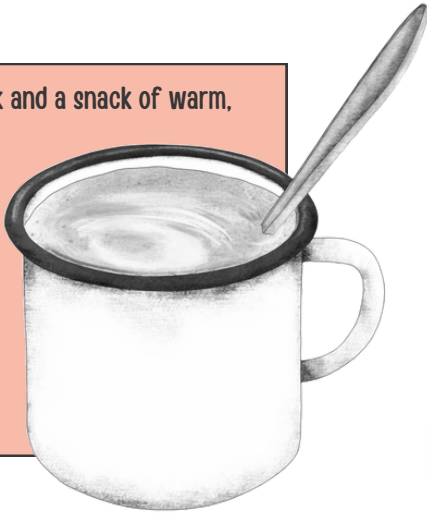


Can you offer to lie with or near your child as they fall asleep for a period of time so that they can begin to build a sense of safety in falling asleep? Or perhaps they could have a pet in the room with them?

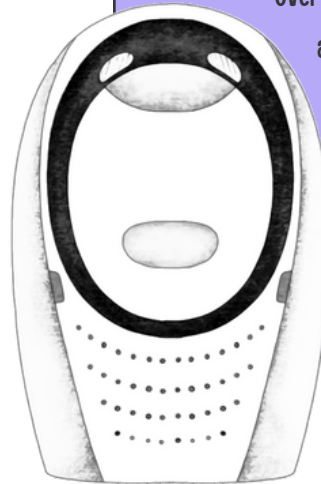


Ensure your child knows that you are always thinking about them if you need to leave the room: 'I am going to make your packed lunch for tomorrow' or 'I'm going to tidy up, I will be thinking of you, and will come back up in 10 minutes'.

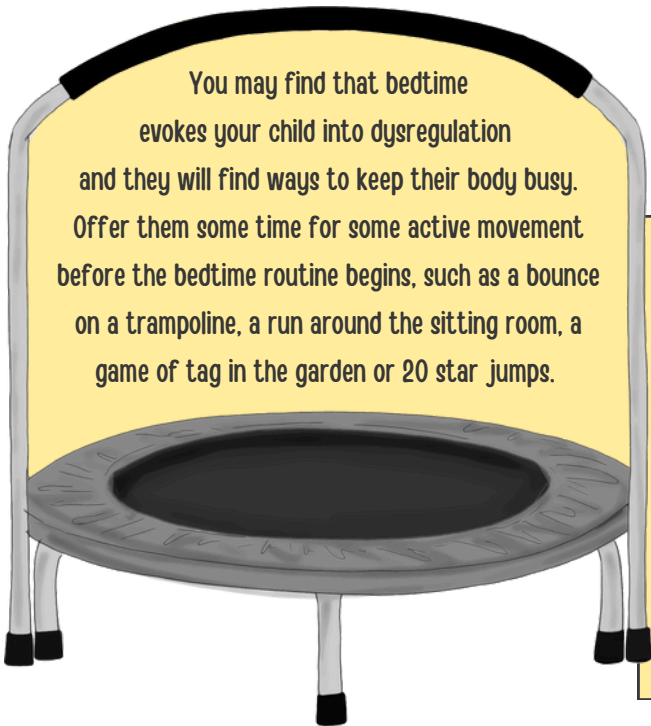
Have a warm drink and a snack of warm, sweet, creamy or chewy food such as a hot chocolate with a bagel, banana or porridge.



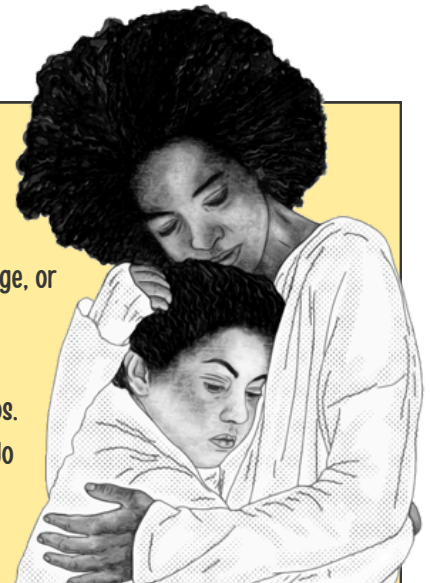
Some children need noise to sleep – quiet and calm can be overwhelming. Noise can be offered with rhythm and predictability such as white noise, music or calm audio books. Some children need the door to be left open, or try reversing a baby monitor so they can hear the chat of others around whilst they fall asleep.



You may find that bedtime evokes your child into dysregulation and they will find ways to keep their body busy. Offer them some time for some active movement before the bedtime routine begins, such as a bounce on a trampoline, a run around the sitting room, a game of tag in the garden or 20 star jumps.



Follow this up with some heavy muscle work or deep touch to help them calm and get their nervous system ready for bed. You could try big bear hugs, massage, or if they prefer to be in control of the movement, suggest you try and push a wall down together or do some press ups. Or provide them with opportunities to do some heavy work jobs, such as stacking books, sweeping or hoovering.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

The ideas in this resource come from our therapeutic work with families and from the work of Marti L Smith. We recommend her book:

- **The Connected Therapist: Relating Through the Senses Paperback by Marti L Smith.**