***Sleep Environment***

* Is their bedding to their preference? Often children seek out parents’ beds because they are more comfortable than their own beds!
* Is your child able to sleep in the dark?
* Is the environment cool and comfortable?

***Bedtime Routines***

* Does your child have a consistent sleep schedule – going to bed and getting up at the same time everyday (within 20 – 30 minutes) even on weekends and on vacations?
* Is your child’s bedtime early enough so that they get the recommended number of hours for their age?
* Do you have a calming routine before bed that allows a glide into sleep?
  + Dim lighting
  + Soft music
  + Screens off an hour before bed
  + Mealtimes finished at least an hour before bed
  + Quiet activities that promote sleep – check that baths/showers are not in fact exciting – if your child laughs, plays and becomes giggly and enjoys making a mess at bathtime, it is likely that they will take longer to settle to sleep.

***Getting to Sleep***

* Is your child able to get themselves to sleep, once drowsy within 20 minutes?
* Is your child able to go to sleep quietly without seeking movement, noise or visual stimulation?

***Sleeping Through the Night***

* Is your child able to sleep through the night most of the time?
* Is your child usually getting the recommended hours of sleep for their age?
* Is your child able to get themselves back to sleep without help most of the time?
* Is your child able to sleep without snoring or loud, audible breathing most of the time?
* Is your child able to stay dry throughout the night?
* Does your child regularly experience sleep walking and/or nightmares?

***Waking Up***

* Is your child waking up at the appropriate time?
* Does your child wake up rested, alert and ready for their day?
* Does your child awake in fairly much the same position they fell asleep in – or is there evidence of a lot of movement during the night?

***Environmental Strategies***

* Air conditioning during the summer months set to between 19-22 degrees depending on your child’s preferences.
* Room darkening shades for early wakers to cut out the morning light
* air purifiers to reduce nasal congestion and breathing difficulties
* Soft mattress – many children do better with a memory foam mattress topper, this provides even pressure along the length of their bodies and helps them feel anchored as they sleep
* “Coloured” Noise – this is a consistent source of sound that is predictable to which the brain becomes accustomed while sleeping, good for children who alert to noises/sounds in the night. This should be played throughout the night. It can be as simple as a standing fan turned on to about level 2 (it doesn’t have to face them) or rain sounds played through Spotify throughout the night.
* Special bedding
  + For those who experience allergies, pillow and mattress covers to reduce dust mites to reduce congestion
  + Bed Sock – a lycra “sock” that fits around the mattress and over the child to provide additional pressure and anchoring to improve sleep

***Routines & Getting to Sleep***

The glide to sleep starts in the late afternoon – if the child is experiencing distress or overexcitement on a regular basis between late afternoon and their scheduled bedtime, it can delay the onset of sleep. Consider your routines and whether they may need to be adjusted (if possible). Some ideas include:

* Having their bath or shower prior to dinner
* Any rough house play sessions with dad before dinner or perhaps keep this to the mornings and weekends if this is overexciting
* Turn off screens at dinner time and transition from that to a quiet activities such as reading, board games, construction, arts and crafts
* Use music as a regulating strategy – we often recommend Sacred Earth Drums for active children, and for that glide to sleep consider instrumental relaxing music your child enjoys. We often recommend Cool Bananas by Gen Jereb for young children from about the middle of the CD (track 11)
* Ensure mealtimes are a relaxing, stress-free time – if there are struggles and high emotions at meal times this can delay sleep by up to 4 hours!
* Consider massage for your child just before bed – a technique I use frequently is the 2 handed continuous spinal massage. Using the heel of your palm, start with one hand between your child’s shoulder blades pressing firmly and move down on their spine. When you have that first hand at their waist, start at the same time with your other hand between their shoulder blades and move down as you lift the first hand and start the process over again. Keep this up for a few minutes. Most children enjoy this massage and find it very calming – it’s a good one to use to help them get back to sleep again if they wake in the night and can’t settle.
* For little ones under 3 years of age, it is important that when you put them down, they are drowsy but not fully asleep – they need to know that you are leaving as it can startle them when they awake and you’re not there.
* Use of sleep transition tools – there are some lovely apps and devices available to assist with sleep anxiety – consider [Smiling Minds](https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app); [Calm](https://www.calm.com/app/kids); and [Meditate Mate](https://www.meditatemate.com.au/product/meditate-monkey/?gc_id=20698552934&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwkuqvBhAQEiwA65XxQGLj9mxSKFkc3RsLMsuTYYLTOXjXGSUlAEYR-EitcnFUQTcQ-v020BoCj5QQAvD_BwE) – these tools are not only helpful for sleep but for encouraging mindfulness which assists with overall regulation.
* Busy Minds – it can be helpful for anxious and mentally hyperactive children to download their thoughts and fears before sleep, a simple strategy can be having a special box or book to write down their thoughts or worries and put them aside until the morning
* Three Good Things – just before sleep get your child into the habit of thinking of 3 good things that they are grateful for from the day just passed. When you start doing this it could be a bit tricky, they will need help with reminders about good things (especially when it has been a rough day) and then something they are looking forward to the next day. This way their minds are focussed on happy thoughts as they go to sleep.
* Monsters Under The Bed – many of our children have wonderful imaginations, unfortunately, sometimes this means that they can imagine the worst! A strategy I often have used with success with young children is to have a special “monster spray” which you use to drive the monsters away – I explain that monsters like yukky smells and because the spray (I usually use lavender essential oil in water as it has some calming properties) smells nice, they don’t want to come near it. Your child directs you to all the places they are worried about.
* When Children are Afraid – it can be tempting to tell your child “not to be so silly, there is nothing to be afraid of”, however, the best approach is to validate them “I can see that you are worried, tell me what your concerns are…” – together you can identify what the worries are and take practical steps to resolve them. If you’re not sure how to best to go about this, please talk with your treating therapist who can assist.
* Snoring/loud breathing – if a child is snoring or breathing loudly this is a sign that their airway is likely needing attention. Snoring can arise from colds, allergies, low tone and if persistent can be associated with chronic fatigue. These children can be slow to wake, cranky in the mornings, low energy or endurance during the day. It’s important to discuss this with your child’s doctor to explore what is going on medially with them.
* Active sleeping – does your child kick off the covers, rock, roll and even fall out of bed? If so they may be experiencing some sensory processing difficulties in the areas of touch and whole body movement awareness (vestibular processing). Your child’s therapist can discuss best next steps with you but the environmental strategies mentioned above along with the massage are a good place to start exploring solutions.