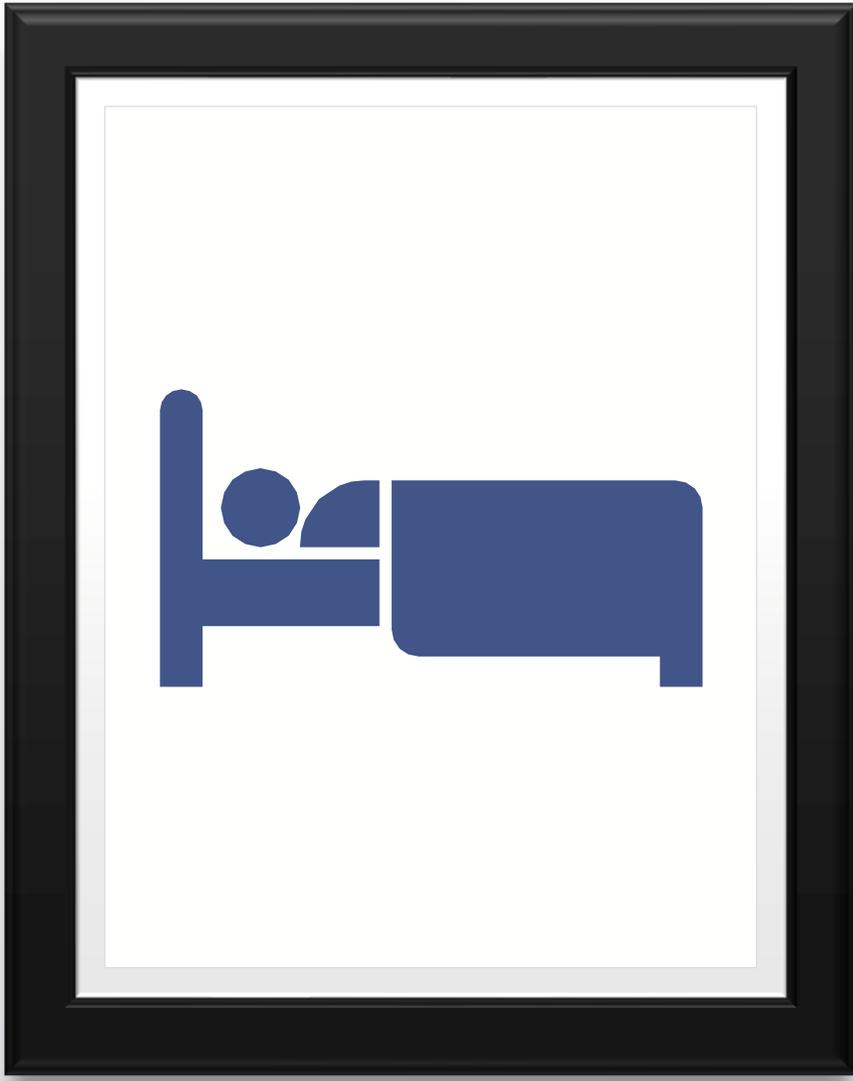




# Young people & Sleep problems

NSFT Psychology in Schools Team

November 2020



# Plan for today's training

1. The Importance of sleep and the current Covid-19 context
2. Common sleep difficulties reported by young people
3. The vicious cycle of insomnia and anxiety
4. The relationship between mood and sleep
5. Strategies to improve sleep





# 1. The importance of Sleep

Sleep is an essential building block for good mental and physical health

Sleep impacts on attention, learning, memory and behaviour

Insufficient sleep can impact negatively on mental health and day to day activities



# The Current Context: Covid-19 Healthwatch School Survey Results 2020

- Young people are anxious about their futures, preparing for exams and worried about getting behind with their school work
- Young people are worried about passing on COVID-19 to family members
- Young people are worried about their friendships
- There are many triggers to anxiety in the current climate
  
- Referrals to the Suffolk Emotional Wellbeing Hub have more than doubled for children and YP in the last six months

---

## 2. Commonly reported sleep difficulties



DIFFICULTIES  
FALLING ASLEEP



DIFFICULTIES  
STAYING ASLEEP



EARLY WAKING



EXCESSIVE DAYTIME  
SLEEPINESS



DISTURBING  
DREAMS OR  
NIGHTMARES



## Disturbed Sleep as a component of mood presentations

- Bi-directional relationship between sleep and mood
- Important to understand the relationship between the sleep difficulties and the mood presentation
- Low mood presentation- lack of sleep, too much sleep
- Anxiety presentation- reduces ability to get to sleep and stay asleep
- Trauma- nightmares

# 3. The Cycle of Anxiety and Insomnia

## Anxiety

*How will I concentrate? How will I cope?*

*I will never get to sleep*

Fatigue  
Frustration  
Irritability  
'mentally foggy'  
Tense, restless

Difficulty getting to sleep  
Reduced levels of sleep

Watch TV, use my mobile phone,  
Play computer games, put the lights on, focus on thoughts



# What Drives Sleep? Three components.

- **Our body clock:** A 24 hour cycle that is in sync with our external environment i.e. sunrise and sunset. The hormones in our brain that control our sleep/wake cycles respond to light levels. In darkness, our brain releases a hormone that induces sleep.
- **Our sleep drive:** The more tired we are, the more likely we are to sleep. During the day we build up a pressure to sleep by keeping active and preventing ourselves from napping.
- **Association between bed and sleep:** Our brain is very good at creating associations between objects and responses and learns that bed = sleep. The association between bed and sleep can be strengthened by only using bed for sleep and not for other activities such as watching TV, playing games or completing work.



# Sleep Interventions

- Bottom-up (e.g. use of toys that can be heated up to provide comfort)
- Behavioural (sleep hygiene)
- Brain level (use of melatonin)
- Top-down (e.g. talking therapies, hypnosis)

## 4. Supporting a young person with underlying anxiety:

### Advice to parents and carers

- Make regular time to talk through their worries with them during the day so it is less likely that worries will surface at night time
- Validate their feelings by showing that you understand their worries and acknowledge any uncertainty
- If difficult thoughts do come up in the night the supporting young people to write them down and then shift attention from them
- Help them to connect or reconnect with activities that matter to them

(e.g. listening to and/or making music, writing/reading, watching films,

exercising, spending time outdoors, connecting with friends...)

- Mindfulness or relaxation techniques (breathing, body scan, grounding)

# 5. Sleep Hygiene Tips

(Routines and habits)

## Setting up an environment to aid good sleep

Ensure appropriate lighting e.g. black out blinds

Manage any noise which may interrupt sleep

Ensure that the room temperature is comfortable

Try to keep the bedroom for sleep and relaxation only

It is important that there is a strong association between the bedroom and sleep so advise that homework is completed in another room if at all possible

Getting out of bed and going back again

Avoid sugary drinks or snacks and those containing caffeine during the day, particularly in the hours before bedtime. Avoid large meals before bedtime

Limit screen time in the 1-2 hours before bedtime otherwise the brain does not receive the signals telling us it's time to sleep

Try to establish a routine of set times to go to bed and wake up (including at weekends)

Establish a 'wind-down' routine before bed (e.g. a bath, time for reading, devices off etc.)



# Making sleep more automatic

Two key ideas:

1. Only use your bed for sleep

2. Sleep scheduling Sleep scheduling is about trying to reduce the amount of time you spend in bed trying to get to sleep.

- Waiting until we are feeling sleepy before getting into bed at night and letting go of the idea that we should be in bed at a certain time.
- Setting a fixed time to get up in the morning and not napping throughout the day.



# Key factors in success

- Making a collaborative plan with parent and child
- Building motivation to make changes to routine
- Making time to monitor and review- manage expectations
- Adjusting plan according to age
- Understanding the wider context – Pull together information on the young person, their mood, their routines, family expectations and boundaries, values

## Useful websites for parents/carers

- <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/kids-bedtimes-creeping-later-and-technology-on-the-up-amidst-covid-19-crisis/>
- <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/sleep-problems/>
- [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) (search 'sleep and tiredness')
- <https://www.sleepstation.org.uk>
- [www.thesleepcharity.org.uk](http://www.thesleepcharity.org.uk)



# Case Study 1

- Young child (aged 7)
  - Struggling to get to sleep, asking lots of questions when put to bed e.g 'what would happen if I get ill again'
  - Climbing into parents bed most nights
  - Parents seeking support on what to do next, aware than own anxiety impacts on actions
- Exploration of child's anxiety and 1:1 support to help express this
  - Creating a set time after school to discuss any problems, concerns, or worries
  - Use of a 'worry monster' to store any worries that do come at night, but not going through these until set time in day
  - Normalisation of parents own anxieties and rationale for different approach
  - Supporting parents to provide containment & physical affection whilst also directing back to own bed
  - Using reward system



## Case Study 2

- Teenager who is awake in the night and sleeping in the day