Hi, I'm Karen and I'm a sleep practitioner working for Sleep Right in Northamptonshire. I'm also a parent of a 14-year-old with Down syndrome, who has kept me very sleep deprived over the years.

Hi, I'm Kerry and I'm a sleep practitioner working in Leeds.

This is the Sleep Right podcast. In this episode, we're talking about what is a good bedtime activity.

To find more information and support for families of disabled children, check out the website at [scope.org.uk/sleep.](scope.org.uk/sleep)

Hi, Kerry.

Hi, Karen. Are you okay?

Yeah, really well thank you hope you are too. So today, we're going to be talking about what is a really good bedtime activity, and we'll talk about some examples of which would be really helpful to do in the run up to bedtime within the golden hour. What examples do you have?

Activities in the golden hour, I think, it all depends on the age of the child, the development age of the child, which obviously is an individual thing that we talk to parents about in the assessment.

We recommend hand eye coordination activities to help calm the child. It all needs to go on individual interest, focus and attention time. I often recommend for the younger children, like a golden hour activity bag or box, an old pillowcase or an old shoe box.

Get the child involved in decorating the bedtime hour or bedtime box, and then in that I ask parents to think of some things that the child is interested in, so sometimes a jigsaw, colouring or a posting activity.

But what I do say is only bring that bag or box out in the golden hour. Don't let the children play with all the activities throughout the day and then bring them out at golden hour as well. It starts to develop an association that when the child sees that visual bag or box that they know it's part of golden hour and what it’s leading up to after those activities that are chosen in their box.

Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. That's a really, really good idea. Quite interesting actually because I find that when I do suggest to some parents about doing a bedtime box and to ensure that the children shouldn't have their screens, and this is a replacement for screen time. Some parents are quite perplexed and think, “Well, what on earth will I give them to do because they live and die for their screens and there is nothing else in their lives anymore?”

We know that this is society today and you know their children are amongst probably the general population. It's the same in every household and some parents are really, really stuck as to what to suggest because they say we don't have any games, we don't have anything at all no arts and crafts or anything.

So, I have suggested in the past that they actually make contact with the teacher at school. Find out what they do in their free time at school, in their art class or anything like that. The school can often come up with ideas of what the child actually likes to do in relation to that particular activity. The parent isn't even aware half the time because it's what the child does at school, and they wouldn't associate it with doing it at home. So that could be a good idea if parents are stuck for ideas.

But, like you say, it's also to ensure that whatever we suggest is age appropriate and I think it does get trickier as we deal with the older children. When we're supporting teenagers, they're unlikely to want to sit there doing puzzles with their parent or want to do anything with their parents a lot of the time.

I know in my house specifically Uno is a massive part of the bedtime routine. My son's 14 now and we, myself, my husband and my son we play Uno every night. We probably have about 10 games and it goes down really well. It's lovely and calming and we have the bedside lamps on, and we just play Uno. You can play any kind of card games or anything like that.

You could do colouring even if you're a teenager. You can look at the mindfulness colouring, and I've had parents who will sit with their teenagers and they've all got a book each and they've got their felt tips and they also find that it's a great time to chat about the day. They also use that as a time for their child to maybe offload, because what we don't want them to do of course is keep that until they actually get into bed because then that can be detrimental to their sleep quality.

I think the activity that we do recommend depending on the child's age is like parking your worries or a worry monster or worry jar…

Yeah, definitely.

…or something that can clear their mind into a positive.

Yeah.

I do know that we are going to be covering that in a separate chat later about bedtime anxiety. So, I know that the ladies will have some amazing ideas to support that.

So, I think with the bedtime activities, we know we can come up with a variety of things all age dependent and is all developmental dependent as well, because we have to focus around the actual development age of the child.

Individual, isn't it, as well? Because, for instance, we recommend sometimes if a child likes to build Lego, the 30-day Lego challenge that's all over the internet is good. So, the parent then sets them a Lego challenge in their golden hour bag or box to build a Lego challenge every night.

Now, some children wouldn’t tolerate that because if it was too advanced for them, or it broke, it could cause a bit of a meltdown. So, then the Lego would be an item that heightened the child's anxiety. Obviously, they shouldn't be going to bed like that.

So, I always say to parents I support “Do they like Lego?” If yes, what happens if it breaks or the child gets frustrated? Then we say, well, let's not have it in the bedtime hour. It's competitiveness as well, if you've got a child that's competitive and wants to win, and they end up losing is that going to cause upset and anger?

Yeah, absolutely.

Not having something like that in the bedtime routine that's going to cause any upset.

Yeah. And of course, we've also got to consider our children who may be have an ADHD diagnosis who may be very hyperactive and can't sit and do any calming activity. So, what would you suggest for the children who need to be kept active?

Yeah, I think it's that and that is a fine line, isn't it? So, we're not expecting them to sit still, and they can’t because of their ADHD diagnosis, but we do need to think of activities individual for that child that can still calm the brain.

So, I think if the bath can be an activity in the bedtime routine it calms them to have that to start off with. I recently worked with an 8-year-old with ADHD and a bath with Epsom salts was calming, and then they got out and started to read. Mum was really surprised at how she can, after the bath, introduce something like reading that they hadn't done previously.

And you've also got to think as well about the children who are very sensory seeking, who sitting down doing a puzzle is not going to cut it for them at all. They need to have some stimulating activity to help them.

So obviously things like that. I often recommend like proprioceptive activities. And we say to parents, it doesn't need to just to be in the golden hour, the proprioceptive activities. So, if they're getting rolled up in a rug or they like the peanut ball over them, that could be helping the child self-regulate so it is classed as an activity. But what we need to say, it's a fine line, because we do not want to over stimulate them to be too hard to put into bed.

I recently worked with a young child who actually had a sensory swing in his bedroom. And first of all, when mum told me I was worrying that would be too much before bed. But actually, what she was doing quite rightly is allowing him to have that as part of his bedtime routine, but then actually hooking it up so he couldn't use it once she'd said goodnight and left the room, and it's worked brilliantly. So, anything along those lines can work really, really well.

Yeah.

So, I think we've given a variety of examples there. I mean, the list is not exhaustive. We can go on forever, and we very much learn from parents day by day from their suggestions.

I think it's all individual learning.

Yeah.

And I think if we can try and calm them as much as possible that's what we need, their body and their brain calm so that the individual child needs to be getting into bed and to fall asleep.

I hope you enjoyed our podcast today. Our Sleep Right service, like all services at Scope, are only made possible by the generous donations of our supporters.

Thanks to them, we’re able to be there for disabled people and their families when they need us and to work towards society were all disabled people enjoy equality and fairness.

If you'd like to help us continue this vital work, you can make a donation or set up a regular gift today.

Simply visit <scope.org.uk/donate> or call us for free on 0808 800 3333.

We’re open from 8am to 7pm on weekdays from 10am to 6pm on weekends and bank holidays. Thank you for your support.