**Sleep Routine Transcript**

Hello and welcome to my little talk on sleep.

During this lockdown and the coronavirus crisis lots of parents and children are struggling with their sleep because routine has been broken, schools are not open anymore and life is just very, very different.

So when we are sleep deprived it’s pretty awful really and as adults we feel quite groggy. We feel quite irritable.

We can find our children quite difficult to handle sometimes because we are tired. We can be quite weepy and we can’t think straight. We’re just not firing on all cylinders. And children who are sleep deprived, particularly primary school children can be hyperactive and be the opposite. They seem to have so much energy but that’s just them being sleep deprived.

So what happens during sleep?

This is what we call a hypnogram and you may well have seen this if you’ve got a fit bit and it measures your sleep cycles. And that’s exactly what they are – sleep cycles.

We go into this deep sleep here, this first cycle and then we come out of it and we go into a dream sleep there, rapid eye movement and then we go back into another deep sleep and we come out of that. We dream a bit more and then we wake up there. It’s called a partial wakening and, as you can see, it gets us to that wake level. And then we go into another sleep cycle which is not quite as deep and the dream state gets longer and longer as the night goes on.

So when we are in this deep sleep, the body is really busy repairing itself. The immune system is getting boosted and it is really important to help us fight off that coronavirus.

When we dream, that’s the brain being very busy and that will sort out any emotions of the day and files short term memory into long term memory files and particularly for children this helps them to learn and remember things and get ready for the next day. So all parts of sleep is really important.

What happens during these partial awakenings? Well we go to sleep here, all nice and comfortable and then we have had a couple of sleep cycles and then we wake up. So what we normally do is turn over and go back to sleep. We might go to the toilet and spend a penny and come back again.

However, if we wake up and our duvet is gone totally then we wouldn’t just turn over and go back to sleep. We would wake up and we would look for it.

And it’s the same with little children. Quite often they might fall asleep on the couch or we might rock them to sleep and then put them in bed. So when they wake up here and their sleep cycles are much shorter than ours; they wake up more often. When they wake up it’s not the same as it was when they went to sleep here. So therefore they need the sense to fall asleep and that usually involves us. It’s very important for little children to fall asleep here on their own, self-settled and then in the night they can just turn over and go back to sleep.

The other important thing to think about in terms of sleep are the hormones that happen. So in the day we have this hormone here called cortisone. It’s the stress hormone but we need it to stay awake and then at the end of the day it starts to drop and this orange one here – that’s our sleep hormone, melatonin and that kicks in. It peaks and it makes us sleepy and it sets the scene for sleep. So when we are a bit anxious and a bit stressed our cortisone can be a little bit high.

So if children are particularly worried about schools not being open or what’s happening with the coronavirus then we need to be mindful of that. And we need ways of trying to bring that stress hormone down and that can be things like exercise but not too close to bedtime. Relaxation techniques, and giving them a massage, listening to a mindfulness app; all good stuff.

Then in the evening we want this melatonin to peak as much as possible to really get sleepy and for that to happen we need darkness. The brain needs to recognise that the darkness is coming, it’s the end of the day and then it will produce melatonin. It’s a tiny gland in the brain called the pineal and this produces the melatonin.

But the trouble is that as society we tend to mess that about by having bright lights in the house. Even the street lights, the LED street lights shining in through bedroom windows can mess up that melatonin. So the brain just thinks it is to stay awake because it is so light and so it stops producing that melatonin.

The worst offenders for stopping that are our electronic gadgets: our tv our iPad, our tablets, mobile phones, X box, Play station, all those electronic gadgets, they really do prevent that melatonin from being produced.

So what we tend to say is, at least an hour before bed, turn them off, dim the lights in the house, get it nice and quiet and relaxing and get ready to set the scene for bed. As the night goes on we need the bedroom to be quite dark to maintain that melatonin. So if children don’t like the dark and prefer the light on, keep it very, very dim and preferably a little plug in light. In the early hours of the morning the melatonin dips and cortisol kicks back in again and then off we go again for our day ahead.

So this is just a draft, an idea of a routine for a child or for anybody for that matter.

So it might start an hour before bed in that we turn off all the gadgets and we stop them playing on the Play station. It’s not just the light that’s given off, it’s the stimulation to the brain as well. So turning them off now before bed, dim the lights, all nice and quiet. They might have some supper; not all children do. Dairy products are particularly good – good sleepy foods and they convert into melatonin. As long as it’s not high sugar not too big a meal just a small snack.

Then it’s quiet play for children: colouring, Lego, jigsaws, that kind of thing. Teenagers can do what they like to do to relax: read, listen to music, or us as parents the same really – read, listen to music, do your knitting whatever you might find fancy.

And then have a bath or a shower or a wash, brush your teeth and go straight into the bedroom so that we are not going back downstairs.

We are not taking children back downstairs to get them excited again. Having a bath or a shower begins to cool the body and the body needs to be cool in order to go to sleep. Read a story, older children like to read their own story, younger children like us to read them a story.

Say “Night night”, and leave them to settle. They might have a comforter, a teddy or a blanket or whatever and leave them to settle on their own.

Top tips for helping us to sleep

For adults as well as children - try to avoid having any naps. We are in lockdown. We are not doing an awful lot and the temptation is to have a nap in the day but it does disrupt sleep.

Young children obviously still need their naps up to the age of 3; so don’t worry about that. But otherwise avoid the naps.

Avoid caffeine if you can. Caffeine disrupts sleep. It disrupts the quality of sleep and also prevents us from going to sleep. Certainly by mid-afternoon stop the caffeine, the tea, the coffee, the hot chocolate, the high energy drinks, coca cola, that sort of thing. Switch to de-caff if you can or just switch to non-caffeinated drinks.

And then follow your bedtime routine. And routine, routine, routine – it is so important. We all need routine and children love routine. You do the same steps in the same order every night and the brain associates what’s coming next with sleep. So there we go. I hope that’s been helpful.

If you have any worries at all, contact your school nurse or your family worker and they can pass you onto the sleep clinic for support and advice or interventions if that’s necessary.

I really hope you found this helpful. Stay safe.