

Sleep and Wellbeing

The physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of pupils at BPSP has always been of great importance to us as a staff but, as the nation's wellbeing has most certainly become an area for both increased concern and focus over the last year or so, so it has in our school community too.

I am currently undergoing a six-month training course as Senior Mental Health Lead in order to be informed and capable of supporting our pupils and staff as well as signposting parents to where they can reach additional help should it be needed. As part of this role, I will be including a short piece in each of the half-termly newsletters.

Sleep and its importance to wellbeing

I recently attended a webinar on sleep. The benefits of getting enough sleep, especially for children, has been well-documented. For example, I am sure it comes as no surprise to hear that quality sleep can impact our day-to-day functioning and, in terms of school, it can help children to develop more effective and efficient memories and therefore, enhance their learning.

However, what has not been made quite so obvious until recently is the increasingly strong correlation between the lack of good quality sleep and depression and anxiety and therefore, mental wellbeing; in other words, less sleep leads to a greater risk of mental health issues in the future.

Therefore, in order to protect the future mental health and well-being of our children, it is key that we encourage a healthy relationship with sleep. Now, it may be that you are lucky enough to have children that achieve good quality, undisturbed sleep as a matter of course. Others of us may not or it may be that you are looking to improve a certain area of sleep e.g. falling asleep unaided.

All that I am about to report is not rocket science but hopefully, could be useful and / or reassuring if your child has issues with sleeping.

Sleep hygiene

It is essential that children have good routines around bedtime and that you stick to a sleep schedule.

- Try and stick to the same time EVERY night, including weekends.
- Allow your child a maximum of 2 hours lie-in at weekends, if needed.
- Don't put your child to bed too early; lying there awake can exacerbate the situation and increase anxiety about being able to go to sleep.
- Try to stop your child taking naps in the day; napping with children who have sleep disturbances is not encouraged.

Stimulus control

It is really important that children have a good relationship with the environment in which they sleep and that good habits to aid sleep are established. The key here is that a child's bedroom should be associated with sleeping rather than being awake and active.

- Where possible, homework should be done in a different room: if this is not possible, homework should be done at a desk or table rather than on the bed.
- Children should watch TV / play on electronic games in a different room other than where they sleep.
- Blue light, linked with the use of screens, influences the chemical which helps control falling asleep. For this reason, screen time should be reduced as much as possible in the 45 minutes to an hour before bed time. This having been said, some children like to read from an electronic device or to watch a little TV before bed. Current research suggests that it is more the level of activity and stimulation which are influential here. e.g. reading from a Kindle is preferable to playing online games.

Adapting habits

By adapting good sleep hygiene and stimulus control, melatonin is released naturally by the body at the right time to trigger a child to fall asleep. In turn, this will be the start of supporting a child's whole sleep pattern. I appreciate this is often easier said than done but by trying to put the aforementioned strategies in place, slowly but surely, changing one thing at a time, there is a fighting chance of success.

If you would like to look into this further or require further support, here are some resources recommended by the sleep expert from the webinar:

Nodding Off by ALICE GREGORY

Helping Your Child With Sleep Problems by Rachel Hiller & Michael Gradisar

www.sleepfoundation.org

www.sleepcharity.org.uk