

### Sleeping issues

Child sexual abuse can affect each child differently. For some, the effects are immediately noticeable, for others, it may take some years before their experience of abuse has an impact on their quality of life.

This fact sheet describes an effect that is often raised with our therapists and counsellors, that is, changes in sleeping habits.

### Changes in sleeping

Sleep is something the human body needs to be able to function – physiologically and cognitively. When we sleep at night, our physical bodies slip into *repair and grow* mode. Our brain (or cognitive) body uses the sleep cycle to *process thoughts, feelings and emotions*, ready for the next period or awake time. A traumatic event (one that shakes someone's understanding of the world) can impact on sleep in a couple of different (and profound) ways.

- Sleep may feel disrupted and your child/ adolescent may find it particularly difficult to sleep.
- Sleep may feel like the only safe place – so you find your child or adolescent is uncharacteristically sleeping for extended periods of time.

Both situations can have a direct impact on your child's capacity to attend school and/ or complete school tasks. It often (of course) directly impacts the adult who cares for the child too.

### What can help?

At True, we recognise that the topic of sleep is fraught – the adults we work with are doing the very best they can to help the child or adolescent in their life rebuild a sleep pattern that works for them.

Our suggestions are based on practical, evidence-based research from families where trauma has impacted sleep. We can only recommend ideas or strategies; we understand that you and your child or adolescent will ultimately decide whether to hang in with these protocols or not.

# 5 Steps on SETTING UP A Routine ⌚

by Sally Chung  
@artastherapy

MUST BE PLANNED, PREDICTABLE & REGULAR

## 1. Establish MOST important Times

- ✦ wake up time
- ✦ breakfast
- ✦ lunch
- ✦ dinner
- ✦ shower/bath time
- ✦ bed time

have expectations that everyone comes together for meals

## 2. Practice patience, Repeat, repeat!

- ✦ you can keep time frames loose but it's consistency that will make routines stick

## 3. Establish special times

- ✦ connect during the day with an activity where you're present with no distractions
- ✦ connect during the night (before bed) with a special ritual ex. snuggles, reading

## 4. Adjust as needed

- ✦ revisit your week to see what did/didn't work
- ✦ invite your child and ask what they'd change

## 5. Accept that it won't be easy

- ✦ remind yourself that new routines will be hard
- ✦ take moments to BREATHE and know that you're trying your best!

### 5 Simple steps on setting up a routine

To preface, we want to share that routines could look differently for each family. What works for one family might not work for another.

However, all routines have similar traits which will make them successful:

- They must be planned
- They must be predictable
- They must be regular.

Although this is not a one size fits all, we wanted to provide some tips on how to provide routine for your child. We've gathered the most important components of what makes a good routine, but you can always tweak it to your liking.

#### 1. Establish a routine

- ✓ Wake up time
- ✓ Breakfast
- ✓ Lunch
- ✓ Dinner
- ✓ Shower/bath time
- ✓ Bed time

Try to aim to have everyone eat, sleep and play at the same time. Having expectations that everyone comes together for meals can provide structure and organization for your child and family.

#### 2. Practice patience, repetition, more practice and repeat!

- Although it's okay to be flexible and keep time frames loose, it's consistency in routines that'll help make routines stick
- For little ones (and grownups too!), it can take a long time and great effort to adapt to structure

#### 3. Establish special times with your child

- Make expectations of spending quality family time whether that's having a regular board game night once a week or making Saturday night a movie night
- During the day: Think of an activity you both can do together to connect during your day. Even if it's a short time, practicing being present and giving your undivided attention (without devices) can go a long way
- During the night: Make time to connect before bedtime, whether that's 10 mins of snuggling, talking about a highlight of their day or reading



## Fact Sheet

---

### 4. Adjust as needed

- Take time to revisit your week and see what worked, what didn't. You can ask your child too on what they appreciated the most or would like to see changed. As we mentioned before, each child and family is different, so tailoring your schedule accordingly is important. Just keep in mind that the essential times (wake up time, meals, bedtime) plays the most important role in your child's routine

### 5. Accept that it won't be easy

- Practice self-compassion by reminding yourself that new routines are hard, especially when confronted with challenging times or transitions. Take moments to breathe, let yourself know that you're trying your best and that tomorrow will be another day!

### The science

For those of you who are interested in the science behind the importance of routines here is some information.

Our nervous system needs and craves predictability. Consistency, knowing what to expect and when, helps us from the time that we are born, to regulate our emotions and to tolerate big feelings. Imagine if someone kept turning the thermostat at home or work up and down all the time, it would not feel very nice to be cold one minute and really hot the next and have no idea whether to keep the sweater on or off. Having routines is like a thermostat for our nervous system.

### Wisdom from parents

Establishing routines is really hard and depending on your family situation they can also be really challenging. Parents tell us time and time again that sticking to routines no matter how difficult makes things easier in the long run. Their children are more settled, less displays of big feelings and parents or caregivers feel more in control, and this feeling allows children to feel a deeper sense of security.

Your True Child and Family Therapist is here for you, to support you through the most difficult aspects of the trauma experience. Please let us know if you are finding sleeping particularly challenging – we will be glad to support you and your child any way we can.

### References

[www.petitjourney.com.au](http://www.petitjourney.com.au)