Sleep & Wake-up Routines with FASD – Children

Adapted from *Strategies not Solutions* - NOFASD Australia. For deeper guidance and practical strategies, see the full booklet.

What's important to understand

Children with FASD may:

- have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or waking up
- experience irregular sleep patterns
- struggle to settle their bodies, especially during transitions
- be sensitive to light, sound, touch or smell
- wake feeling disoriented, distressed or overwhelmed
- appear "awake" but not fully ready to function

These patterns are linked to brain-based and sensory differences, not poor routines or lack of effort. Emotional wellbeing can also affect how children fall asleep, stay asleep and wake.

What can help

A calm, predictable sleep environment

A simple, uncluttered bedroom with minimal stimulation can help children settle and feel safe at night.

Consistent sleep and wake routines

Using the same routine, words and order each night and morning, even on weekends and holidays, can support regulation and smoother transitions.

Support with settling

Slow, familiar bedtime rituals (for example, reading, quiet play, or a warm bath or shower) can support regulation, even if falling asleep takes time.

Sensory-informed comfort

Some children settle better with specific sensory supports such as a sleeping bag, preferred bedding. Gentle rocking and calming scents may also help if they are well tolerated.

Support with waking

A predictable, gentle wake-up sequence helps children transition from sleep to starting the day. Gentle cues, support to sit up and clear guidance about what comes next can help children get started.

What can make it harder

- Sudden changes to routine
- Too much stimulation before bedtime
- Expecting quick transitions from sleep to action
- Rushing mornings or assuming a child is "awake enough" without support or scaffolding

When to seek extra support

If sleep difficulties are ongoing or affecting daily life, it's important to seek guidance from a health professional, particularly where individualised support or medication may need to be involved.

A strengths-based reminder: Every child with FASD is unique. Children do best when sleep and waking routines are predictable, but matched to their individual needs. Parents and carers hold valuable knowledge about what works for their child.

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