



Peer  
Education  
Project



Mental Health  
Foundation



# **Sleep:**

## **Finding our confidence with sleep**



**Assembly**

## Assembly script:

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- **Introduction**  
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- **What is mental health?**  
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- **Why is sleep important for our mental health?**  
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# Overview



This assembly has been developed from the Mental Health Foundation's Peer Education Project (PEP) - a secondary school-based, educational programme that aims to give young people the skills and knowledge they need to safeguard their mental health and that of their peers.

PEP is a carefully researched, effective approach to mental health education whereby older pupils within school or college deliver mental health lessons to younger pupils.

For more information about PEP and how your school can get involved, [click here.](#)

## Assembly aims:

- To understand what sleep is and how important it is for our mental health and wellbeing.
- To understand what good sleep is and what factors can affect sleep hygiene.
- To explore how we can promote good sleep for ourselves.

## You will need:

- Assembly script
- PowerPoint slides
- OPTIONAL: [TED Talk](#) – Why we sleep

## Estimated delivery time:

- 20-30 minutes
- The assembly script can be divided into smaller sections and delivered across multiple assemblies, form times or lessons to fit into your timetable.

**To ensure the content is most relevant, update the assembly script and PowerPoint slides to share support options in school or college and the local community with your pupils.**

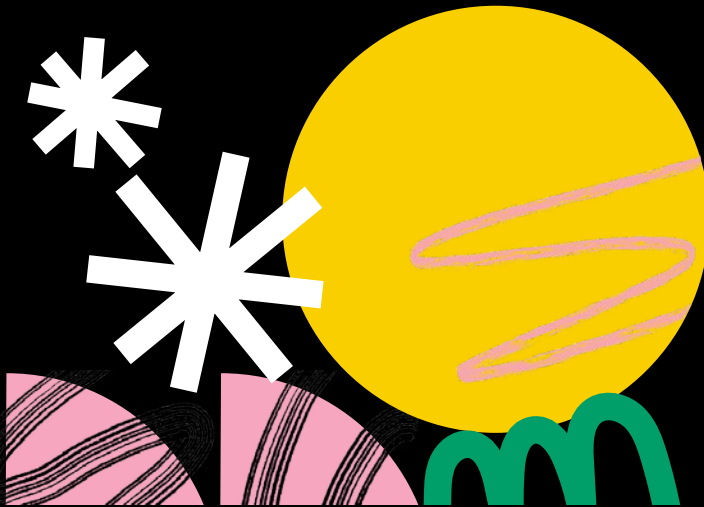
## Slide 1



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# Sleep: Finding our confidence with sleep

Assembly

## Script

Welcome to today's assembly on sleep.



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## Slide 2

### Introduction



#### This assembly will cover:

- \* What sleep is.
- \* How important sleep is for our mental health and wellbeing.
- \* The different ways we can promote good sleep health for ourselves.



SLIDE 2

## Script

Sleep is an essential function for our minds and bodies. The amount of sleep we need is often linked to age. However, there are many factors that can affect our ability to sleep. Therefore, we will each have our own sleep patterns, individual to us.

This assembly is an opportunity to understand:

- what sleep is,
- how important it is for our mental health and wellbeing; and
- the different ways we can promote good sleep health for ourselves.



## Slide 3

### What is sleep?



Sleep is an essential function, regulated by two complementary processes.



• Process 'C'



• Process 'S'

SLIDE 3

### Script

OPTIONAL: Show a section of this [TED Talk](#) on why we sleep.

Did you know, we spend about a third of our lives asleep? We sleep every day, yet we often don't think about how important it is, and how it can impact everything we do.

Sleep is an essential function, regulated by two complementary processes, called 'process C' and 'process S'.

'Process C' stands for 'circadian', which refers to our internal 24-hour body rhythm. This rhythm occurs through changing levels of 'clock genes' found in almost every cell in the body.

'Process S' is sometimes called 'sleep/wake homeostasis' or 'sleep pressure'. It refers to the increased need to sleep that we feel, the longer that we spend awake.

As sleep pressure builds, the 'circadian process' increases the signal to stay awake, because it is the daytime. However, as night approaches, the 'circadian drive' for being awake reduces, and the stored-up 'sleep pressure' takes over and supports us to sleep.



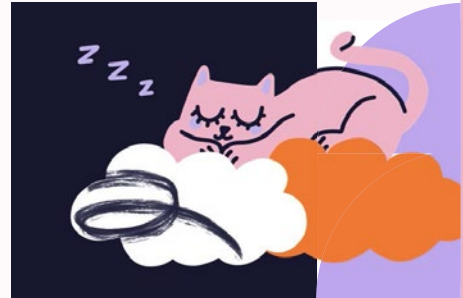
## Slide 4

### What is sleep?



**Sleep helps our bodies and minds recover and heal from the day by:**

- \* Boosting our immune system.
- \* Helping us manage our hunger.
- \* Preventing some health conditions.
- \* Improving our concentration.



SLIDE 4

## Script

Sleep is important for helping our bodies and minds recover and heal from the day. Getting good sleep can help boost our immune system, help us manage our hunger, prevent some health conditions, and improve our concentration.

Sleep is also an important factor in maintaining good mental health.

In 2020, [the Mental Health Foundation found](#) that nearly half of adults and two-thirds of teenagers agreed that poor sleep had a negative effect on their mental health.





## Slide 5

### What is mental health?



## Script

Mental health is made up of our thoughts, feelings, moods, and behaviours. Mental health is not fixed throughout our lives. Just like physical health, mental health can change depending on experiences and circumstances, as people move through different stages of life.

Mental health is something we all have and need to look after. Each of us will find different things helpful for our mental health.

Developing good sleep health, and understanding the ways we can protect it, will help us to look after our mental health and wellbeing.



## Slide 6

### Why is sleep important for our mental health?



Good sleep can improve our ability to manage our:

- \* Feelings
- \* Emotions
- \* Behaviour
- \* Recall memory
- \* Concentration



SLIDE 6

## Script

Getting good sleep can help us to cope with the world around us, by improving our ability to manage our:

- feelings,
- emotions,
- behaviour,
- recall memory; and
- concentration.



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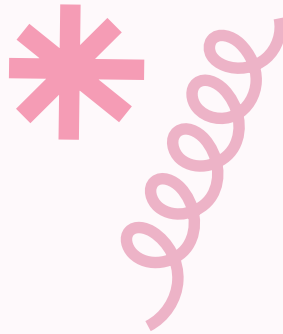
## Slide 7

### Why is sleep important for our mental health?



Poor-quality sleep can make us feel:

- \* Low
- \* Anxious
- \* Irritable
- \* Confused



**44%**  
of young people report  
difficulty sleeping.

- \* Unable to concentrate
- \* Unable to manage our emotions or the challenges in life

SLIDE 7

## Script

Whereas lack of sleep or poor-quality sleep can make us feel:

- low,
- anxious,
- irritable,
- confused,
- unable to concentrate; or
- unable to manage our emotions or the challenges in life.

Experiencing a sleep problem is very common. A [report](#) by the World Health Organisation found that 44% of young people report difficulty sleeping, with 38% saying that a lack of sleep had meant they were too tired to study and 23% being too tired to concentrate in class.

*Continued...*



## Slide 7 Script cont.

Sleep and mental health problems are very closely related. A lack of sleep over a consistent period can increase impulsive behaviour, negative thinking, feelings of anger, and is linked to increased risk of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety disorders.

Individuals experiencing mental health problems also have an increased risk of poor sleep. For example, a [report](#) found that of children with a probable mental problem, 72.3% had a sleep problem three or more times over a week compared with 22.9% of those unlikely to have a mental problem.

However, there are many things we can do to improve our sleep health.



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## Slide 8

### What is good sleep health?



#### Good quality sleep is when:



- \* The time it takes to fall asleep is less than 30 minutes.
- \* We achieve the recommended sleep length for our age.
- \* Wakefulness once asleep is under 30 minutes.
- \* The percentage of time in bed spent asleep is more than 85%.

SLIDE 8

## Script

Although it is not always easy to achieve, good sleep is essential for our mental health and wellbeing.

Did you know, it is recommended teenagers have, on average, 8-10 hours of sleep a night?

But, when it comes to good sleep, it isn't just about the number of hours we sleep, it is also important that our sleep is good quality. This means that we fall asleep relatively quickly, we don't wake up too often during the night, and that the amount of time spent in bed asleep is high.

Generally, sleep is said to be of good quality if:

- the time it takes to fall asleep is less than 30 minutes,
- wakefulness once asleep is under 30 minutes,
- we achieve the recommended sleep length for our age; and
- the percentage of time in bed spent asleep is more than 85%.



## Slide 9

### The principles of good sleep



1. Value our sleep.
2. Prioritise our sleep.
3. Personalise our sleep.
4. Trust our sleep.
5. Protect our sleep.



SLIDE 9

## Script

Getting good sleep can be daunting, but by understanding how sleep works and learning about our own sleep patterns, we can build the confidence to begin improving it.

Often, the routines we follow, our home lives, and our school and community environments aren't structured in ways that value and promote good sleep health. While there are external changes that can be made to better recognise and prioritise sleep, there are also things each of us can start to work on individually to support our own sleep and mental health.

Professor Colin Espie, Professor of Sleep Medicine at the University of Oxford, suggests there are five principles for good sleep health.

- |                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Value our sleep.       | 4. Trust our sleep.   |
| 2. Prioritise our sleep.  | 5. Protect our sleep. |
| 3. Personalise our sleep. |                       |



## The principles of good sleep



## 1. Value our sleep.

Sleep is essential for life, and we need to take sleep seriously.



SLIDE 10

## Script

## 1. Value our sleep

Sleep is essential for life. It plays an important role in the renewal and repair of body tissue, metabolism, growth and development, infection control, learning and memory, and in the regulation of our emotions. Sleep also affects the quality of our daytime alertness, energy, productivity, and mood.

**TOP TIP:** If possible, create a sleep zone in your bedroom, where the bed is just a place for sleep – no homework, watching tv or playing games.

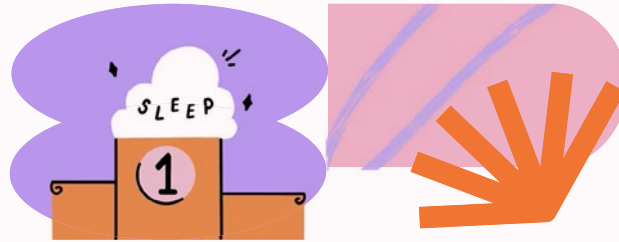


## The principles of good sleep



### 2. Prioritise our sleep.

We need to put sleep first when making choices about what we want to do.



**TOP TIP:**  
Reduce  
screen time at  
bedtime.

SLIDE 11

## Script

### 2. Prioritise our sleep

Prioritising sleep means putting sleep first more often, or at least higher up the list, when it comes to making choices about what you want to do. There are many priorities that can take up space in our daily lives, but it is important to create the necessary space for good quality sleep.

**TOP TIP:** It can be tempting to watch the next episode of a new tv programme, watch one-more TikTok video or send one more text, but place importance on reducing screen time at bedtime.





## The principles of good sleep



## 3. Personalise our sleep.

We need to find the 'sleep window' that works best for us.



**TOP TIP:**  
Use a sleep  
diary to  
track sleep  
patterns.

SLIDE 12

## Script

## 3. Personalise our sleep

It is important that we understand our own sleep needs and protect the time we need to get enough sleep. This can be difficult if our 'sleep windows' – when and how long we sleep – don't match the activities in our lives, especially ones that can't be moved, like school or work. However, by recognising the demands on our time that we can and can't control, we can begin to develop our own personalised 'sleep windows' and routines. We are all individual, so we need to listen to our own bodies and find what works for us.

**TOP TIP:** Try using a sleep diary to record the timing, quality, and quantity of your sleep. Over time, you may notice patterns of the things that support you to have good quality sleep and the things that make good quality sleep difficult to achieve. By understanding what things affect your sleep, you can build a healthy sleep routine.

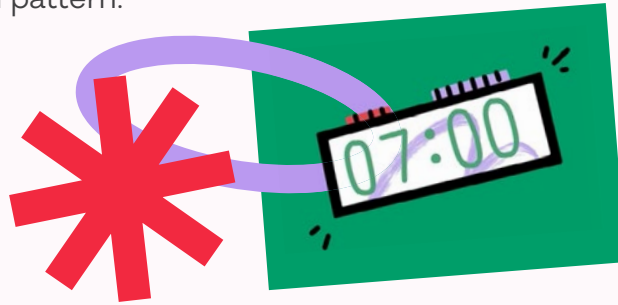


## The principles of good sleep



## 4. Trust our sleep.

Sleep is a natural process, and our sleep will get itself into a good pattern.



## TOP TIP:

Be patient. It is trial and error finding patterns and routines for good sleep.

SLIDE 13

## Script

## 4. Trust our sleep

If we are struggling to sleep, it can make us feel frustrated and anxious. We may put pressure on ourselves to get 'the perfect' night's sleep, which often makes sleep even more difficult. If we are struggling to sleep, we must try not to overthink things.

**TOP TIP:** Working out your own patterns and routines for good sleep will be trial and error but, over time, this will strengthen your sleep-wake rhythms and help to establish patterns you can trust. If you are struggling to get to sleep, you could try:

- Listening to calm music, a podcast, or a guided meditation.
- Reading.
- Writing your thoughts on a piece of paper.
- Getting out of bed and stretching.



## The principles of good sleep



### 5. Protect our sleep.

Lifestyle factors are the things we do and consume during the day, and as we prepare for sleep.



#### TOP TIP:

Be patient. It is trial and error finding patterns and routines for good sleep.



SLIDE 14

## Script

### 5. Protect our sleep

Both lifestyle and environmental factors can affect our sleep health. The effect of different factors on sleep will be individual to us. Therefore, to protect our sleep, it is important to avoid or prevent things that negatively affect our sleep hygiene, and regularly input factors that promote good sleep.

Lifestyle factors are the things we do and consume during the day, and as we prepare for sleep. There are common lifestyle factors that are known for affecting sleep health such as:

- Caffeine – where the stimulant properties of caffeine tend to delay the start of sleep.
- The types and quantity of food – where eating dense meals too close to bedtime kickstarts the metabolic system, disrupting the internal body clock and leading to restless sleep.

*Continued...*



## Slide 14 Script cont.

TOP TIP: Alongside a sleep diary, you could write down your food and drink intake, and mood, to understand how these factors interlink and impact your sleep quality.



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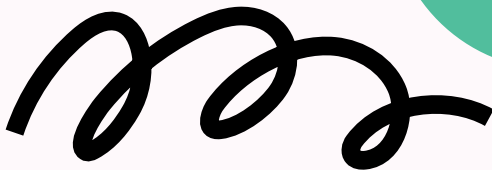


## The principles of good sleep



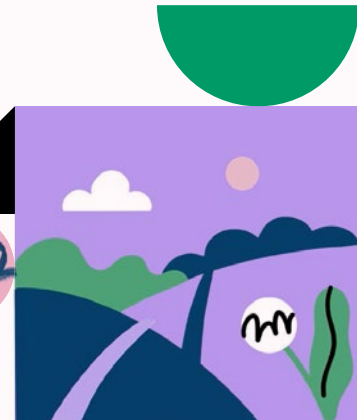
## 5. Protect our sleep.

Environmental factors refer to the spaces around us when we are trying to sleep.



## TOP TIP:

Speak to someone at home or another trusted adult to help minimise the effects of environmental factors.



SLIDE 15

## Script

## 5. Protect our sleep

Environmental factors refer to the spaces around us when we are trying to sleep - our bedrooms, homes, and the areas we live. We all have different environmental factors, and they often can be out of our control. But for some factors we can find ways to change or protect ourselves from them. For example, if you live in area with high background noises or light, you could try using earplugs to muffle the noise, or an eye mask to block out the light.

**TOP TIP:** If there is something in your sleep environment that is affecting your sleep health, speak to someone at home or another trusted adult. They may be able to support you to put things in place to minimise the effect of this factor.



## Slide 16

### Why can good sleep health be difficult to achieve?



Some people will experience greater barriers to good sleep health, and these factors are often beyond their control, such as:

- \* Sex and gender
- \* Race and ethnicity
- \* Socioeconomic status
- \* Experiences of trauma
- \* Health conditions

SLIDE 16

## Script

There are many things in our lives that can affect our sleep health, such as high levels of stress, consuming caffeine or sugary foods before bed, or experiencing developmental changes in our bodies.

For example, as bodies change with puberty, the sleep/wake pattern tends to shift, resulting in less natural pressure to sleep earlier in the night and a greater desire to go to bed later and wake up later. However, structures in the day often prevent sleep patterns shifting, which can lead to a chronic lack of sleep.

The factors and level of impact we experience will be different for everyone.

However, it is important to recognise that some people will experience greater barriers to good sleep health than others, and often these factors are often beyond their control.

*Continued...*



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### Examples of inequalities to good sleep health include:

- **Sex and gender:** Sex differences have been observed both in the normal sleep patterns of men and women and in the prevalence of some sleep disorders. For example, the prevalence of insomnia has been found to be higher in women, whereas obstructive sleep apnoea has been found to be more prevalent in men.

*\*Insomnia is a common sleep disorder that can make it hard to fall asleep, hard to stay asleep or cause you to wake up too early and not be able to get back to sleep.*

*\*\*Obstructive sleep apnoea is when something blocks part or all of your upper airway while you sleep. Breathing can become very shallow or can stop briefly.*

- **Race and ethnicity:** Research has found that minority ethnic adults (in particular, Black/African American adults) are more likely to experience shorter, and poorer quality sleep. This disparity in sleep experience may reflect larger social and economic inequalities. For example, minority ethnic groups have been found to be more likely to work longer hours, later shifts and multiple jobs, which can negatively affect sleep duration and quality.
- **Socioeconomic status:** Socioeconomic status (a combination of education, occupation, and income) has a significant relationship with how well we sleep. For example, individuals who live below the poverty line have been found to have particularly poor sleep quality, and food insecurity (having insufficient resources for consistent access to food) has been linked to a higher risk of sleep disorders, depression and anxiety.

*Continued...*

## Slide 16 Script cont.

- **Experiences of trauma:** Poor sleep is shown to have a clear relationship with the experience of trauma. For example, research has found that sleep disturbances are common among people exposed to traumatic experiences such as abuse, bullying, violence in the home, and bereavement.
- **Health conditions:** Sleep difficulties can be a symptom of some health conditions, but the symptoms of some health conditions can also make it more difficult to sleep. For example, up to 90% of people with conditions associated with chronic pain report poor sleep, and, similarly, sleep disturbance may affect how chronic pain is perceived. Regardless of the cause, sleep problems for people with chronic illnesses have been linked to an increased risk of anxiety and depression and reduced quality of life.



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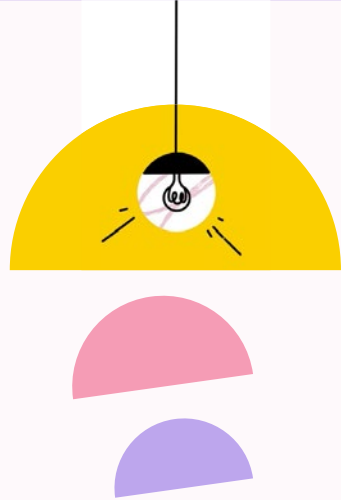
## Slide 17

### Final thoughts



#### Remember to:

- \* Value your sleep.
- \* Prioritise your sleep.
- \* Personalise your sleep.
- \* Trust your sleep.
- \* Protect your sleep.



SLIDE 17

## Script

Sleep is important to all aspects of our lives, yet it is often one of the first things we compromise on when life becomes busy or overwhelming. No one can manage without sleep; so, we need to take the time to develop our own good sleep health.

#### Remember to:

- value,
- prioritise,
- personalise,
- trust; and
- protect your sleep.



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## Slide 17 Script cont.

For factors that sit outside of our control, and make it difficult to develop good sleep health, it can be difficult to make changes.

An important first step is to acknowledge, understand and raise awareness of such inequalities. For example, you could get involved in World Sleep Day held each year.



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## Slide 18

### Further information and support



SLIDE 18

## Script

If you concerned about your sleep patterns, speak to a trusted adult – this could be a member of staff at school, someone at home, or another person in your life.

*Add information about support options within your school and local community.*

You can find out more tips for developing good sleep health by reading:

- the [MHF Tips for Young People on Sleep Confidence by the Mental Health Foundation](#), and
- young people's sleep stories via the [Teen Sleep Hub website](#).





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