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SLEEP TRAINING

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Did you know 80% of children diagnosed with autism suffer from sleep disorders? According to The Center for Disease Control (CDC), sleep related challenges are prevalent between the ages of three and five, occurring at a rate of 20% to 50%. Establishing healthy sleep routines early on in life is important as it can help with cognitive and social development. The National Sleep

Foundation recommends children ages 3-5 get 10-13 hours of sleep a day. If you have a child resisting bedtime or wakes up in the middle of the night and does not stay in his/her room, you may want to consider an aba approach.

The most effective method used to address bedtime challenges is extinction (also known as “the cry it out” method). This method is reliable but may cause tremendous stress on parents. If you are a parent that finds letting your child cry themselves to sleep challenging, there are other options for you. For instance, shaping. Shaping entails providing lots of reinforcement when teaching a skill for the first time. It is more of a pre-emptive approach rather than reactive. Note: this strategy is labor intensive for parents. If your child cries while in bed, the parent immediately consoles the child by rubbing the child’s back while keeping a neutral face. Hence, providing reinforcement. The child feels comfort in knowing you are present and will likely fall back asleep. Before the maladaptive behaviors escalate, you are reinforcing low intensity behaviors (a short cry or call for you). Other supports include establishing a bedtime routine, using a visual schedule and engaging in relaxation activities (such as listening to soft music, snuggling, a massage or wearing a weighted vest). Remember, consistency is key to helping your child succeed with sleep training.



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