

In comfort

Getting the right amount of sleep at home and in settings is essential to children's well-being. *Nicole Weinstein* offers some tips and resources

Sleep is fundamental to a child's well-being, cognitive development and emotional state of mind, yet research reveals that up to 40 per cent of children will at some point experience sleep problems. As a result, early years practitioners need to be well-equipped to advise parents on their child's sleep patterns (see box), while in the nursery, they need to create an environment that is conducive to sleep, with cots, sleeping mats, calming music, maybe even soothing lavender.

Nursery chain Busy Bees uses a variety of cots in its 342 settings nationwide, depending on the size of the space available and the décor of the nursery. All cots, however, are drop-sided in design, to support staff with lifting, and have good-quality, wipe-clean mattresses.

Deena Billings, head of childcare, says, 'The Standard drop-sided cot from Hope Education is popular in our nurseries, and we find that the clear-end cots from Community Playthings help with supervision and also enable us to attach photos of the children's family to support their sense of belonging.'

The chain uses beds other than cots but discourages children from sleeping on bean bags or large cushions. 'We like to trial new products if we feel they are suitable and safe for the children,' says Ms Billings. 'We have Dream Coracles from Community Playthings, which we place in the cosy areas of some of our nurseries. We've also recently had some bespoke sleep pods and furniture created by Millwood. These are similar to the Dream Coracles but larger and made out of fabric.'

'We don't encourage children to sleep on the bean bags or large cushions, as they find it more difficult to moderate their own temperature and can sometimes get too hot. They are a nice space for younger children to crawl into to have a short rest, but not for sleep times.'

Sleeping arrangements are adjusted according to the age and needs of the child. 'Each child is allocated a cot with fresh bedding, and if they are unable to pull themselves up to stand, they have a cot mobile attached, usually from Mamas and Papas,' says Ms Billings. 'This is removed once the children can pull themselves up, because it then becomes a choking hazard.'

'Older children sleep on a sleep mat, with fresh bedding. We often use foldable sleep mats for space-saving purposes. If children fall asleep in a pushchair while out on a walk, on a staff member while having a cuddle or on a cushion or cosy den, they are moved to either a cot or sleep mat to sleep.'

To ensure a relaxing experience for the children, the settings often play calming or classical music softly. 'This also helps the children to understand when it is sleep time,' says Ms Billings. 'Some nurseries use lavender sachets in the sleeping areas out of children's reach, as this supports a calming environment.'

TRAINING AND ADVICE

The restful sleeping environments are backed up by sleep training for staff and good staff relationships with the children's families. Sleep training is part of every staff member's induction at Busy Bees. This consists of an in-house video, which supports the company's Sleeping Babies and Children Policy, a three-page best-practice document, including, for example, safe sleep procedures. To ensure staff remain familiar with the policy, it is discussed regularly at staff meetings and practitioners are given a quiz on its content.

Parents can share with staff information about how their child likes to sleep – perhaps with their socks off or with a comforter – while staff can advise parents about their child's sleep patterns and any problems that



Above from top: Snuggly Den from Millwood Education; Blue Sack Style Sheet from Hope Education; and the Millie & Boris Musical Cot Mobile

Right: Multicoloured Rest Beds from Hope

Far right: BabyHub's SleepSpace Travel Cot with Teepee; TTS's Portable Self Inflating Day Bed; and Cosy's Deluxe Cosy Bed



arise. To support parents, Busy Bees has devised 'A Guide to Healthy Sleep – for You and Your Baby', which parents can take home and has top tips and advice on sleep routines.

RESOURCES

Cots, coracles and dens

- Clear-end cots, from £400, www.communityplaythings.co.uk
- Standard Cot, £279.99, www.hope-education.co.uk
- Denver Wooden Cot and Mattress, £199.95, with pine finish, www.tts-group.co.uk
- Dream Coracle, £275, www.communityplaythings.co.uk
- Snuggly Den, Grey Chenille, or Cream and Caramel, £189, www.millwoodeeducation.co.uk
- BabyHub's SleepSpace Travel Cot with Teepee can be used as travel cot, play area, insect-free zone and children's play tent. The innovative design has just won two Platinum awards at the Loved By Children Awards 2018. Suitable from birth to 36 months, the cot comes with an easy-to-fit mosquito net and cover.

Beds and mats

- Deluxe Cosy Bed, £50, www.cosydirect.com





- Blue Sack Style Sheet, £164.90 – one-piece sheet with elasticated corner tapes in polycotton; Multicoloured Rest Beds, pack of 12, £335.99; Washable Rest Beds, £52.99 – a bed with a pillow in polycotton; and Blue Rest Bed, £37.99 – light, stackable, easy-to-clean beds. All from www.hope-education.co.uk
- Rest Mat, £43, www.community-playthings.co.uk
- Stacking Plywood Sleepyhead Rest Beds, from £99 for one, £455 for a pack of five; and Portable Self Inflating Day Bed, £39.95 – both from www.tts-group.co.uk
- Folding Padded Sleep Mat, 10pk, £145.95, www.cosydirect.com
- Folding Stitched Sleep Mats with Storage Bag, 6pk, £159.95, from www.tts-group.co.uk



Main picture: Busy Bees uses drop-sided cots. Inset: Folding Stitched Sleep Mat from TTS



Blankets

- Reversible fleece blankets, 6pk, £66, www.millwoodeeducation.co.uk
- Cotton Blankets, £11.99 each, www.hope-education.co.uk
- Fleece Blankets, 4pk, £34.95, www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk
- Cotton Fitted Cot Sheets, 2pk, £13.49, www.earlyyears.co.uk

Mobiles

- Millie & Boris, Pink and Musical Cot Mobile, £39 each, www.mamasandpapas.com
- Musical Mobile, £27, www.millwoodeeducation.co.uk
- Cream Nylon Baby Canopy (1m) – hang from the ceiling and decorate, www.tts-group.co.uk ■



SLEEP: THE LATEST ADVICE

Founder of the Children's Sleep Charity, Vicki Dawson, provides the latest advice on sleep.

Why is sleep so fundamental to young children?

Sleep deprivation impacts negatively on the mental, physical and emotional health the child, and their whole family.

Why is it vital to raise awareness of good sleeping patterns?

The important role that sleep plays in well-being is still seriously undervalued, and the Children's Sleep Charity, as well as a number of organisations, including PACEY, have committed to raise awareness about the importance of sleep to improve the health of our children.

Last year, we released the 'Children and Young People's Sleep Manifesto', and partnered with PACEY to develop a downloadable poster, 'And so to bed... promoting sleep in the early years'. This contains guidance for practitioners on the average amount of daytime and night-time sleep required according to a child's age, as well as a series of practical tips and advice.

What challenges do practitioners face when it comes to pleasing parents?

Parents often ask practitioners to keep their child awake all day, believing the child will then sleep better at night. However, keeping a tired child awake is extremely difficult and unhelpful in supporting a better night's sleep.

A well-scheduled nap can help children to sleep better at night. Stopping naps can leave the child sleep-deprived and finding it harder to fall asleep at night.

Any top tips for practitioners on establishing good sleep routines in nursery?

Sleep diaries can help practitioners to establish a full picture of a child's sleep patterns at home and then plan appropriate nap times in the setting. The sleeping area in a setting should be calm and not over-stimulating.

And practitioners should work in partnership with families to offer the child a sleep routine that is as consistent as possible.

What training is available for practitioners?

We offer a range of accredited training packages. Our Sleep Tight programme was written in conjunction with Professor Heather Elphick, sleep consultant at Sheffield Children's Hospital. It aims to offer an early intervention approach to sleep problems in the early years and trains practitioners to deliver a five-week series of sleep workshops to families in their area.

The Children's Sleep Charity also works in partnership with a range of professionals to offer a three-day accredited Sleep Practitioner course. Lectures are delivered by a range of professionals, including Professor Elphick, Dr Fisher (a clinical psychologist), Janet Wooton (an enuresis nurse) and sleep practitioners. This course takes a behavioural approach to sleep and provides practitioners with the tools to offer one-to-one support to families whose children are experiencing more complex sleep problems.

What websites and resources do you recommend?

- For professional and parent resources, visit: www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/index.php
- For information on cots and sleep environments, see: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/mattresses-and-bedding/
- Tired Out, a support hub by Family Fund for parents and carers of disabled children who are experiencing sleep problems, is at: www.familyfund.org.uk/tired-out
- For general advice there is also The Sleep Council at: <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk>
- 'And so to bed', a downloadable poster, is at: www.pacey.org.uk/shop/business-products/eyfs-documents/sleep-in-the-early-years-downloadable-poster