



How to Design a Bedroom that Helps Your Child with Autism Sleep

Credit: Jenny Wise, freelance writer

At times, it feels like your child's behavior is entirely out of your control. While it's true that parents of children with autism face many challenges that other parents don't, there is a lot you can do to influence your child's behavior. One big thing you can do is ensure your child gets enough quality sleep each night.

Symptoms of Poor Sleep

According to [Disability Scoop](#), when kids with autism don't sleep well, they display “more aggression, irritability, and [have] greater difficulty paying attention during the day.” While behavior problems are more severe in children who wake repeatedly during the night, kids who don't spend enough time in bed or who have [parasomnias](#) also exhibit more behavior problems compared to their well-rested peers.

Unfortunately, such sleep problems are common for children on the spectrum. [Spectrum News](#) reports that half of all children with autism have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Researchers aren't entirely clear why sleep problems are so common in kids on the spectrum. Some posit it's a dysregulation in the body's circadian rhythm, while others think insomnia in kids with autism is a side effect of medication, overstimulation, or co-occurring medical disorders such as gastrointestinal problems.

[Sleep studies](#) help parents of children with autism get to the bottom of why their child can't sleep, but studies take time and don't always provide a clear answer. In the meantime, parents are left wondering what they can do now to improve their child's sleep and, with hope, their behavior.

Set Up a Comfortable Bed

The first thing parents can do is eliminate bedtime issues unrelated to their child's autism. Is their bed old and lumpy, is there too much noise in the house at night, or is their bedtime routine inconsistent? [Solving these problems](#) has a big impact on a child's sleep, regardless of autism.

Comfort is key for kids on the autism spectrum. Sensory issues make many kids with autism especially sensitive to discomfort, even if that same discomfort doesn't bother another child. If your child's mattress is more than 7 to 10 years old, it might be time to buy new. Even a newer mattress can be the source of discomfort if your child is a hot sleeper. If you notice your child sweating at night, a mattress designed to [transfer heat](#) away from the body will provide relief.

Consider bedding as well. Sheets or pajamas that are scratchy or have distracting tags can trigger sensory issues and prevent a child with autism from falling asleep. Choose bedding and nightwear in fabrics your child finds pleasant. Some children on the spectrum find compression sheets and [weighted blankets](#) particularly soothing.

Focus on Their Surroundings

Parents should also ask if the bedroom décor is stimulating or soothing for their child. Autism Parenting Magazine [explains](#) that reds, yellows, oranges, and whites tend to overstimulate kids on the spectrum, while blues, greens, purples, and browns relax them. By decorating your child's bedroom in calming hues, you can avoid stimulating your child before bedtime.

Lighting, too, is important. Many children on the autism spectrum are bothered by fluorescent bulbs and unfiltered natural light. Filtered natural sunlight, incandescent bulbs, or LED bulbs are better choices for lighting a child's bedroom. The addition of a dimmer switch lets parents turn down the lights and create a soothing ambiance before bed.

If you want your child's bedroom to be a comforting place outside of sleep, adding a sensory zone to the bedroom is a great option. A sensory safe zone doesn't have to be complicated or expensive; it can be as small as a corner where your child can retreat when feeling overwhelmed. A [sensory space](#) should be free of any hazards that could harm your child and include soft surfaces and calming activities.

When your child doesn't get enough sleep, it's exhausting for everyone. However, parents don't have to accept sleeplessness as a fact of autism. By taking these steps to improve your autistic child's sleep environment, you can make a real difference in your child's quality of life.

Image via [Unsplash](#)