



Sleep

Melanie Clarke

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About us

Charlie Waller was a strong, funny, popular, good-looking and kind young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie took his own life. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded The Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around depression, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.



We're talking mental health

Our vision

A world where people understand and talk openly about mental health, where young people and those who support them are equipped to maintain and enhance their mental health and wellbeing, and have the confidence to seek help when they need it.



Let me introduce myself...

Former:

- Secondary school PE teacher
- Leadership in 3 to 18 school for 13 years

Current:

- Trainer and consultant (Local authorities, DfE, Charlie Waller Trust)
- Elective Home Education Advisor
 - Independent safeguarding advisor for Multi Academy Trust



Safety first

- ✔ Confidentiality – Shared personal experiences to be handled sensitively
- ✔ Safe space
- ✔ Interruptions and questions are welcome



Objectives for the session



The importance of sleep



Factors which impact on sleep



Supporting healthy sleep habits



The importance of sleep

“There is a time for many words, and there is also a time for sleep.”

Homer, *The Odyssey* (8th-7th century B.C.E)





Which is the correct answer?

How much sleep do children aged 5 to 7 need?

◆ A: 8 to 10 hours

◆ B: 13 to 15 hours

◆ C: 10 to 13 hours

◆ D: 9 to 11 hours



Which is the correct answer?

How much sleep do children aged 8 to 11 need?

◆ A: 8 to 10 hours



◆ B: 13 to 15 hours

◆ C: 10 to 13 hours

◆ D: 9 to 11 hours




Insufficient sleep in primary school children

-  of UK children (6–11 yrs) get 8 hours or less sleep on school nights
-  get 7 hours or less, well below recommended levels
[\[leeds.ac.uk\]](https://leeds.ac.uk)
- Indicates a substantial proportion are sleep deprived.





Insufficient sleep in primary school children

- **36%**
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Insufficient sleep in primary school children

- **36%** of UK children (6–11 yrs) get 8 hours or less sleep on school nights
- **15.2%** get 7 hours or less, well below recommended levels [leeds.ac.uk]
- Indicates a substantial proportion are sleep deprived.





Special Educational Needs & Sleep

- We know that sleep problems are already common among children and young people with SEND
- Significant and regular sleep problems are experienced by around 70% of autistic CYP and around 55% of those with ADHD
([Richdale et al., 2009](#); [Konofal et al., 2010](#))





Why Sleep Matters

There's a lot going on during sleep:

- Memory consolidation
- Growth hormones are released
- Waste products are removed from the brain
- Immune system processes take place





Better learning & school performance

Sleep helps the brain **process and store new information (memory consolidation)**

Well-rested children:

- Have better attention and focus in class
- Perform better on cognitive tasks and learning activities





Improved behaviour & emotional wellbeing

Adequate sleep supports:

- Emotional regulation and mood stability
- Reduced irritability, impulsivity, and stress
- Children with good sleep show:
- Fewer behavioural problems
- Better ability to cope with daily challenges



Sleep helps children feel calm, resilient, and ready to learn



Healthy brain development

The brain is **actively developing during sleep**

Physical growth & health

Growth hormone is released during **deep sleep**

Enough sleep supports:

- Bone and muscle development
- Better immune system function





Melatonin and sleep

- A natural hormone made in the brain
- Often called the “**sleep hormone**”
- Controls the body’s **sleep–wake cycle (circadian rhythm)**

Helps tell the body **when to feel sleepy and when to wake up**



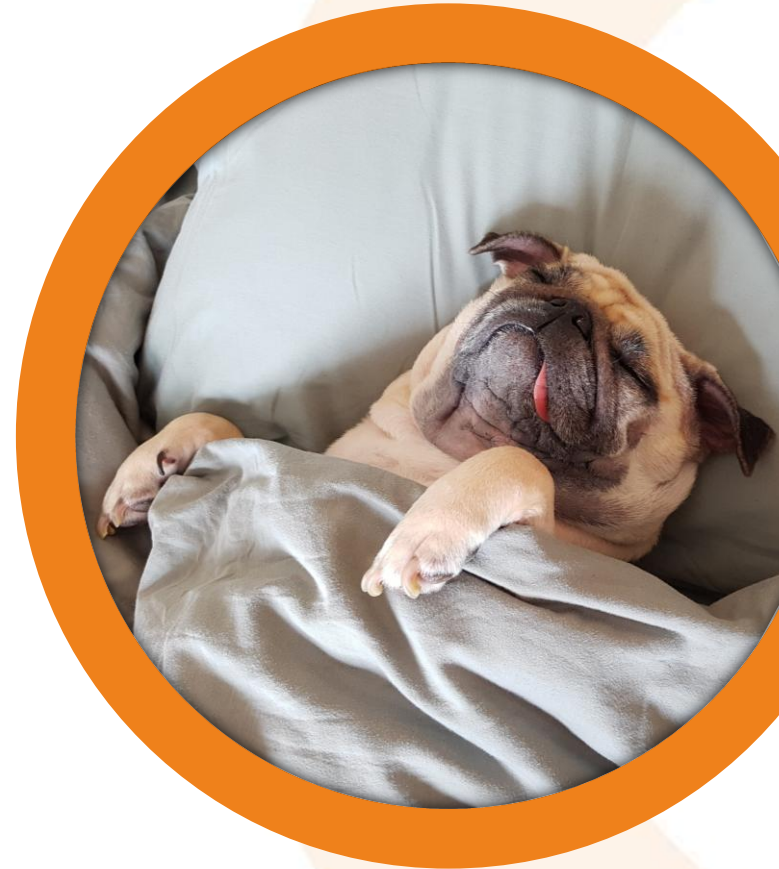


How melatonin works

Levels increase in the evening (darkness) → child feels sleepy

Levels drop in the morning (light) → child wakes up

Regulated by **light entering the eyes** and signals to the brain





Sleep disorders

Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA)

- 1-3% of children
- Up to 25% of children with specific conditions (e.g. obesity, sickle cell disease, Down syndrome and others)

(Great Ormond Street Hospital, 2020)





Nightmares

- Can occur at any age
- More common in children
- Around half of 3-6 year-olds
- 20% of 6-12 year-olds
- Parents/carers should get support if their child has two or more nightmares per week for more than six months

(Sleep Foundation, 2023)



The Role of Screens

Research shows



90% of studies link screen use to poorer sleep in children.

Evening screen use is strongly associated with:

- Poor sleep quality
- Daytime tiredness

Screen use can reduce melatonin by up to 69–98% in children.

Blue light from devices **blocks melatonin release** making it harder to fall asleep.

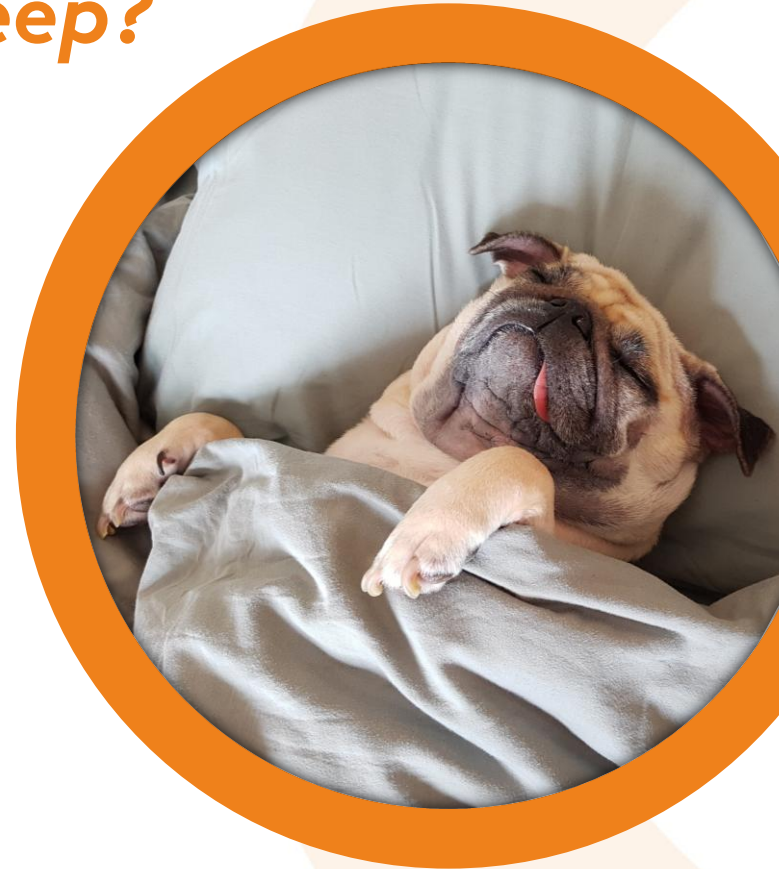
Mental stimulation - Games, videos, and messages keep the brain alert and prevent “wind-down” needed for sleep.





How can we promote sleep?

What should we be doing to maximise our chances of getting a good night's sleep?





Getting better sleep **Outdoors**

- Increase exposure to natural daylight during the day (preferably morning)
- Get regular physical exercise (preferably outdoors where possible)





Getting better sleep

Food and drink

- Avoid stimulants
- Think about what your child is eating and drinking, and when
- Overall diet quality has a considerable impact on sleep quality
([St-Onge et al, 2016](#))



Getting better sleep

Sleeping environment

- Bedroom should be reserved as a place for sleep only
- Declutter and avoid distractions
- Make sure it is as dark (and cool) as possible





Getting better sleep

Timing is everything

Develop a regular sleep/wake cycle: go to bed at the same time each night and aim to wake up at the same time each morning



Getting better sleep

What Parents/Carers Can Do

- ✓ **Have a “screen curfew”**

Switch off devices at least 1 hour before bed

- ✓ **Keep bedrooms screen-free**

Charge devices outside the bedroom

- ✓ **Create a calm ‘wind down’ bedtime routine**

Reading, bath, quiet talk instead of screens

- ✓ **Model healthy habits**

Children copy adult behaviour

- ✓ **Use parental controls if needed**

Limit access during night hours

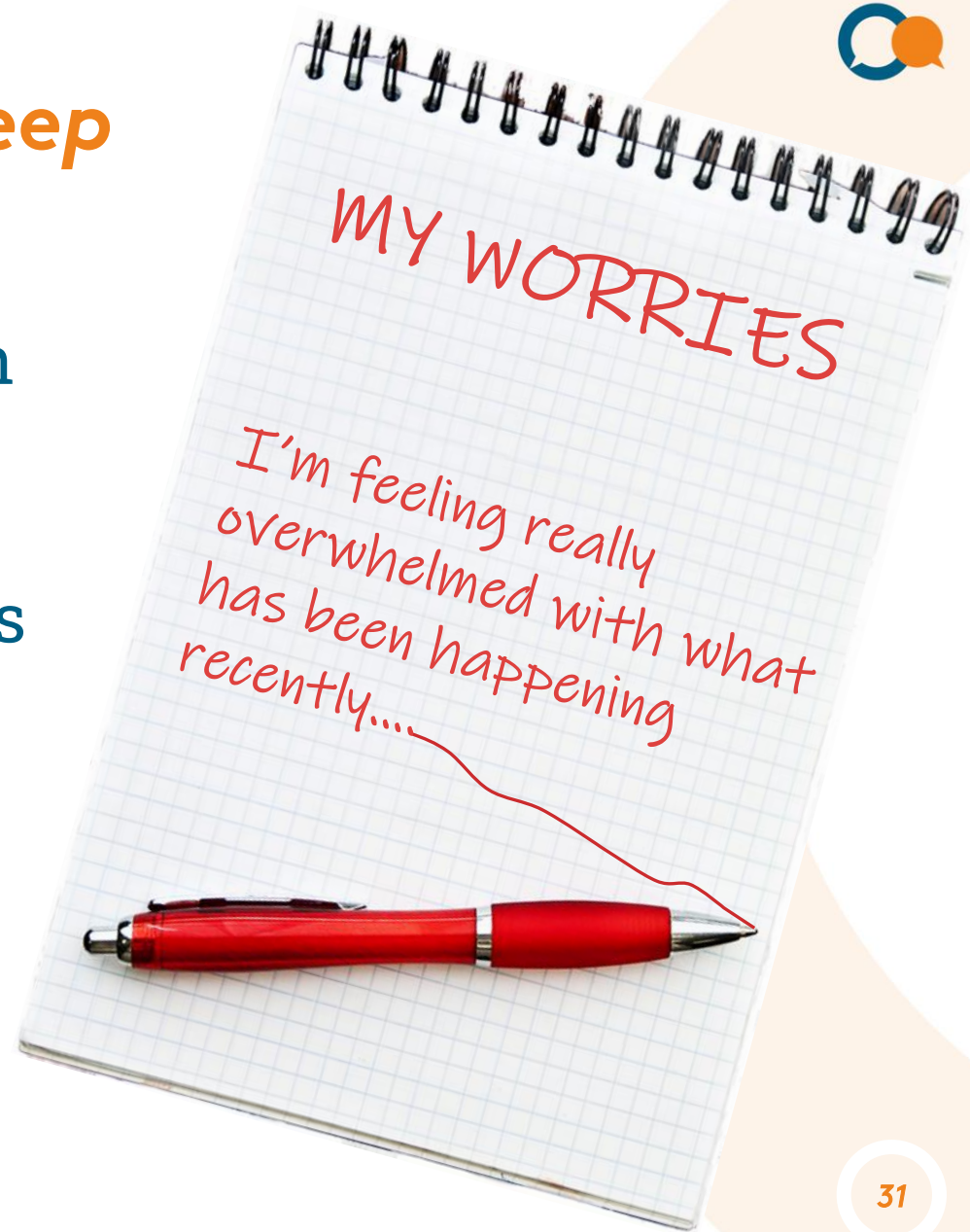




Getting better sleep

Dealing with stress

- Practice relaxation exercises during the day
- If you have worries which keep you awake at night, write them down earlier in the day





Sources of support

- www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep
- www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness
- www.thesleepcharity.org.uk
- www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org

*Thank you
for listening*



The Charlie Waller Trust

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Training feedback

Feedback from participants on our training is a key component in evaluating the effectiveness of and in making improvements to our training and resources.

We would be very grateful if you would complete this short survey based on the training you have received today.

