

# THE SLEEP DISRUPTORS CHECKLIST: FIND OUT WHAT'S REALLY KEEPING YOUR CHILD AWAKE



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# WHY YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SLEEP DISRUPTORS

If your child with autism is struggling with sleep, either waking up multiple times per night or having trouble falling asleep, there may be hidden disruptors preventing restful nights. Identifying these disruptors is the first step to creating a sleep plan that actually works. Use this checklist to uncover possible causes and start making small, effective changes today!



# SLEEP DISRUPTOR CHECKLIST

*Check all that apply. Unsure?  
Turn the page to learn more!*

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# INCONSISTENT SCHEDULES

The brain thrives on consistency and needs a predictable sleep schedule. When a child wakes at different times each day, their bedtime will also vary, making it harder for their body to regulate sleep.



Establishing a consistent wake-up time and bedtime based on age-appropriate sleep/wake windows helps ensure bedtime aligns with their natural sleep needs.

# SLEEP DEPENDENCIES

The brain learns to fall asleep under specific conditions and expects those conditions to remain the same throughout the night. If anything changes, it can cause disruptive awakenings.



This means that if a child falls asleep with assistance—such as being rocked, held, or touched—or with external factors like music, lights, or being in one location and moved later, they will wake up when those conditions change.

To promote uninterrupted sleep, ensure that the sleep environment remains consistent from bedtime to morning. Remember: Assisting sleep is stealing sleep!

# LACK OF A CALM BEDTIME ROUTINE

A structured and soothing bedtime routine signals to the body that it's time to wind down.



Some families are advised to help their child "get the wiggles out" before bed with activities like jumping, crashing, or running. However, these activities actually stimulate the nervous system, making it harder to fall asleep.

Instead, focus on calming activities such as a warm bath, fine motor tasks, or quiet play. A predictable routine helps the brain recognize when sleep is approaching.



# SCREEN TIME BEFORE BED

Blue light from screens mimics sunlight, suppressing melatonin production and delaying sleep by 2-3 hours.



To support healthy sleep, try ending screen time before starting the bedtime routine. If immediate elimination isn't feasible, at least ensure screen use happens in a well-lit room rather than in the dark to minimize its impact on melatonin production.

# EFFECTS OF MEDICATIONS AND SLEEP AIDS

Sleep aids and sedatives can disrupt the body's natural sleep cycles, creating a false sense of sleep readiness and altering sleep architecture.

Children who rely on these aids may experience more deep sleep at the expense of REM sleep, which is essential for cognitive and emotional development.



Additionally, certain daytime medications may impact sleep onset, and their effects wearing off at night can contribute to night wakings. If you suspect medication is affecting your child's sleep, consult their doctor to explore possible adjustments.



At BetterSleep Behavior Consulting, we know that better sleep means better days—for the whole family. We specialize in assessing sleep-specific behaviors to identify the core challenges preventing healthy, restful sleep. Using the science of sleep and the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), we create individualized, behavior-based sleep plans tailored to your child's unique needs.

## Connect with me!

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