



# *Sleep Success*

*From a Tired Parent  
Caitlin LeGros, CNM and Autism Parent*

# Sleep Goals for you today

- *Caregiver techniques you can use*
- *Supplements and Medications*
- *Helping the caregiver*
- *Our story*



# My main goals for you

- 1. You're not crazy
- 2. Lots of reasons why this is happening
- 3. No one knows the answer
- 4. Caregiver resources:  
AutismUp, David's refuge



# About us

- Owen age 11
- Sleep issues since birth
- Medical parents
- High privilege level
- Trial & Error, learn from our experience/ mistakes



# Common Issue in the Autism Community

- Over half of children with autism – and as many as 4 in 5 – have one or more long term sleep problems
- Chicken or the Egg?
- Professionals/ science does not have the answer...yet!



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Center for Sleep in Autism Spectrum Disorder  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences



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## Types of Sleep issues

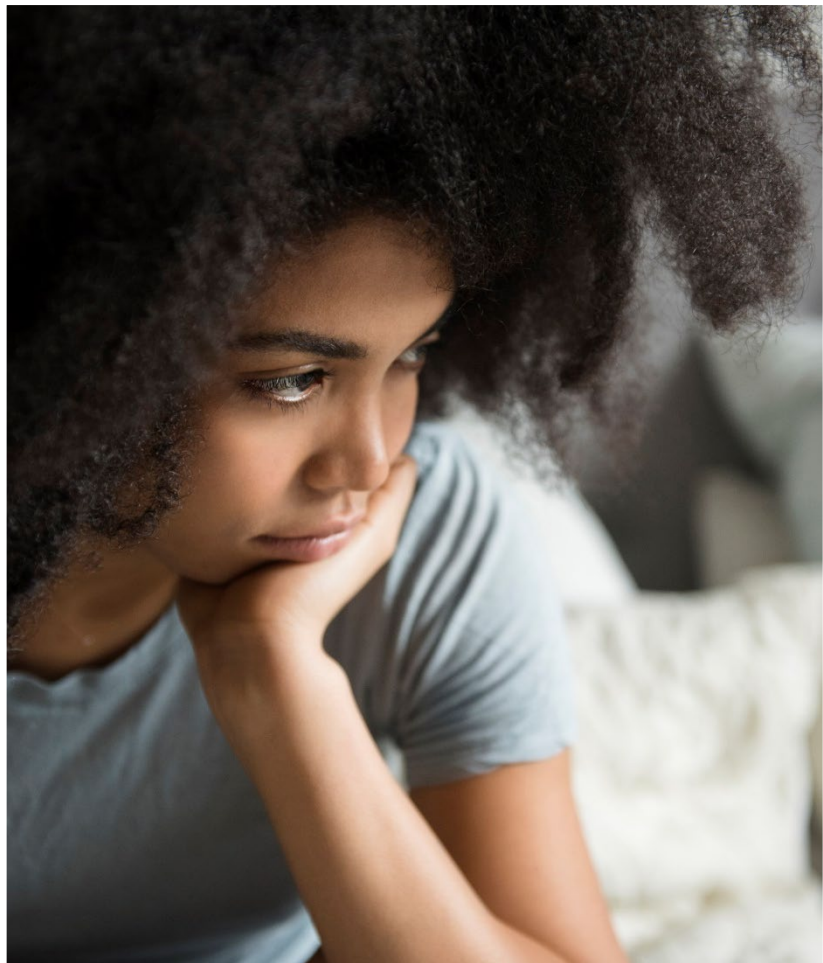
- Resisting bedtime
- Trouble falling/ staying asleep
- Waking up very very early
- Restless sleep
- Unpleasant experiences- nightmares, night terrors, bedwetting
- Sleep disorders- sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, insomnia



# Why?

- Sleep-wake disruptions (circadian rhythms) → low Melatonin
- Hypersensitivity – OR – Sensory seeking
- Attachment to rituals that are not helpful to sleep
- Trouble communicating bedtime/ routine
- Mental health conditions affect sleep (ADHD, Anxiety, Depression etc)
- Low Iron
- Tummy troubles
- Tired caregivers with other responsibilities
- ALL of these create MORE sleep problems





Have you  
ever had  
trouble with  
sleep?

We all have!

Worries

Excitement

Exercise too late

Body not tired

Mental health  
concerns

Physical concerns



# What can we do?

Talk to other parents

Talk to your professionals (teachers, doctors, nurses)

What medications are being used currently?

Medical tests (Iron level, Reflux, sleep study)

Mental health (therapist, psychiatrist)

Learn the recommendations

Ignore the recommendations if they don't work for you



# 1. During the Day

- *Bright lights*
- *Same time for wake up everyday*
- *Regulated days*
- *Naps at the same time/place*
- *Bedroom for sleep only*
- *Active body/ mind*



## 2. Before Bed

- *Aware when bedtime will start*
- *Routine 15-60 min before scheduled bedtime*
- *Avoid stimulating activities (maybe)*
- *Avoid heavy meals or snacks*
- *Avoid caffeine/ soda*
- *Dim lights*
- *Comfortable PJs, sheets etc.*
- *White Noise*





### 3. Bedtime

Bath or shower (maybe)

Pick your hardest  
battles first-  
toothbrushing?

Add preferred activities  
& choices later

Visual schedule

## 4. After falling asleep

- Move kid back to your preferred sleeping situation
- Re-set conditions for ideal sleep (noise machine, close windows, pick up items in path)
- Twilight Toileting
- Cut their nails with a headlamp (maybe)



# Our story- #1 Tip Melatonin

- 3mg gummies at Nighttime
- 30 min before bed
- Usually asleep 30-60 min later



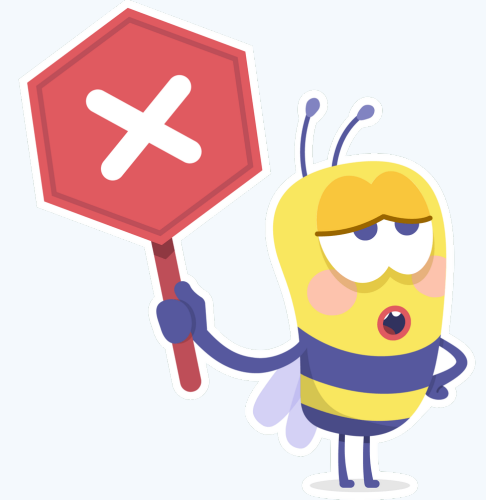
# Our story #2 Tip - Meds before Surgery

- Sleep study -> obstructive sleep apnea
- Surgery to remove tonsils and adenoids
- 3 years later offered Hydroxyzine



## Our story #3 Tip - Ignore Rules

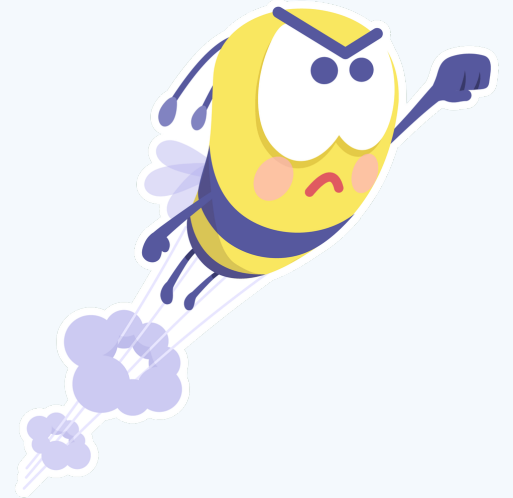
- Sleep hygiene, Iron supplements, schedule doesn't help
- Shower before bed
- Fall asleep near others
- Lights on/ off doesn't matter
- Using screens before bed to calm down
- Going to bed later = same wake up 6am
- Nothing changes early early wake up waves





# Our story #4 Tip: Extreme parenting

- Car rides
- Grocery store @ 4am
- 1 parent up, other sleeps
- Take kid out of the house to let others rest
- Changing the scene helps
- Screens OK
- Sleep box in their room



# Our story #5 Tip - Sleep deprivation in you

- Cognitive decreases with <7hrs in a row
- Longer to respond
- Decreased vigilance/ awareness
- Decreased logical reasoning, flexible thinking
- Mood and judgement resemble anxiety/ depression
- Irritability, low energy, poor judgement
- Falling asleep at the wheel
- Caregiver burnout



# Resources

David's Refuge "Caring for the caregiver"

- Community of parents online & in person
- Family, parent, single parent events
- Respite weekend away for you
  
- Autism Up
- Family Autism Center/ Camp Puzzle Peace
- Sleep resources @ Autism Speaks
- Sleep Foundation.org



Caitlinphillipslegros@gmail.com