

Everything sometimes doesn't look like it but everything goes round and round! Everything goes on that's how it seems, you think it will never come back, you might have to wait till you see it again cause it follows a circular track. The sun doesn't go up, that ain't true and it don't go down between me and you, it only looks like that because the world goes round and round, round and round. In my life I have found that everything goes round and round. Round and round, round and round.

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That everything goes round and round.

Zoe Salmon: A warm welcome to all of you listening today. My name is Zoe Salmon and theatre company Tutti Frutti has invited me to host this dreamy podcast all about sleep. This is a subject so close to my heart, as I know how important sleep is for all of us, for our health, wellbeing and for families to be happy. In my role as ambassador for the sleep charity I am always talking about the importance of having a good night's sleep.

And who on earth would have thought it, that sweet dreams would get it sorted!

Zoe Salmon: We have two amazing guests today who are talking about how sleep is vital for the wellbeing and happiness of families. First I'd like to introduce you to Claire Earley, co-coordinator and lead sleep practitioner at the sleep charity. Claire specialises in helping children with additional needs and is passionate about supporting families. Claire, you came to the sleep charity through your experience of sleep challenges within your own family and you have so kindly offered to share that story with us today.

Claire Earley: Thank you Zoe, it's lovely to be here. Jack was born with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, he's tube fed and he has lots of physical disabilities. Jack had had sleep issues for 8 years of his life, he would often wake up early, every hour on the hour. When I asked doctors why he isn't sleeping they just said children with disabilities don't sleep and sent us on our merry way. Jack was in and out of hospital for different things, mainly catching bugs and colds. He could be in there for a couple of weeks or up to three months. He didn't like change, he would often scream a lot for hours when we changed his routine or did something different. He wasn't learning or developing. Jack's brother Ian's behaviour was very challenging and disruptive at school and school wanted to get him the diagnosis of ADHD. I said no, it's not that it's because he's overtired and not getting any sleep. The family broke down, I separated from their dad. I couldn't return to work, I ended up on antidepressants because I felt so alone and so down. I went to do some voluntary work supporting other parents of children with disabilities. That's when I met Vicki, the founder of the Sleep Charity. I started putting into place all the things she told me with Jack. One thing Vicki did advise me was to be consistent and persevere with it. This was hard work. After following the new routine for a good three weeks he slept through. I was so shocked! I dashed in his bedroom just to make sure he was breathing and there he was, fast asleep snoring his little

head off, all comfy. This continued and it's changed a lot of things in our lives. For Jack, he started learning more, he became more sociable, he'd do anything, he'd go abroad on holiday, we'd take him to concerts, he would go on roller coasters, water slides which was never the done thing before when he wasn't sleeping. He's now 21 and he loves his sleep. I came off the antidepressants, didn't feel like a failure anymore. I remarried. Ian never did get that diagnosis, he is now 24, has a full time job and loves his life. I was lucky enough to go and complete the sleep practitioner training myself to help support other parents so they're not feeling alone and they're getting that good night's sleep.

Zoe Salmon: Thank you Claire, it's so inspiring to hear your experience. Lack of sleep can be so awful but it's great that you can overcome these challenges with the right help. My next guest is going to tell us all about bedtime boxes, a clever technique to help young children get to sleep at night. I'm delighted to introduce Helen Rutherford who works freelance for the sleep charity and has extensive experience with early years children.

Helen Rutherford: Thanks Zoe, it's great to be here and talk to families about what they can do to help their children have a better sleep time routine. So we're talking about bedtime boxes which very basically is a box filled with activities that we use as a way to relax our children's brains in the run up to bedtime. More specifically what are they? They're a great idea which allow a family to have a dedicated time and place to do pre-bed time wind down activities. Trying to think of something to do off the cuff every evening is hard work, it's unsustainable and it makes it more likely that the programme will fall apart at this first hurdle. They take away that stress. The box can be personalised to suit whoever is using them, even parents. When a child invests time and effort into making it theirs they also take a part of the ownership of the routine which makes it more likely for them to engage. Starting a

bedtime routine becomes as easy as turning the lights down low and getting the box out. The contents of the box contain fine, hand eye coordination activities which I will go into in a little more detail in a minute. Alongside a wider programme they help lower the activity in the logical thought provoking areas of the brain and engage the more right sided, artistic part. A lot of children with ADHD talk about having fizzy brains at bedtime. They're physically tired but their brains are still going at 90 miles an hour. This first part of a routine can help with this. I want to say a little bit about screen use just now. We ask that screens be turned off as we begin this wind down to bedtime because their use can inhibit melatonin production. Now some children, especially those on the autistic spectrum, may have a reliance on screens and devices that make putting them away before bedtime very difficult for them. Trying to take away a device that a child needs can cause anxiety and the last thing we want to do is link anxiety with the bedtime routine. This is almost certain to cause avoidant behaviours. If this is the case it is beneficial to do some screen withdrawal work first before implementing a sleep programme. Only when the child is able to hand over an appliance, to do an activity, should you begin with a routine, to help minimise that anxiety. This can take some weeks to complete, so be patient. Even though a lot of our children are genuinely reliant on screen time, having contents in the box that have been chosen by them can give them an incentive to become willingly involved and participate in the new nightly routine. They will then become familiar with this new routine and in turn will begin to rely on it, making bedtime a more peaceful and relaxing event. So what should we be putting in our boxes? It's important to engage your child in setting one up as much as their age and development will allow. It's not often as a professional that I suggest parents do research on Google, other search engines available, but in this instance it's an excellent idea. In your search engine type calming or hand eye coordination activities for a and then add the developmental age of your child. So a younger child might like threading, putting small objects into holes, clipping pegs onto a

piece of string across the room, poking pipe cleaners into a colander, colouring, sticking, making collages, play dough, marble run, jigsaws, things like that. An older child might like to do more advanced colouring, colour by numbers, drawing, painting, making clay models, painting those games figures, air fix type models, scratch art, playing an instrument, Lego, Mokano, cooking, dot to dot puzzles, sequin art. You know your child best, choose something that isn't going to cause frustration. For example I often talk about threading activities being perfect, but for some children this is a skill that is still being mastered so won't necessarily be relaxing. Items can be sourced really easily from car boots, charity shops and pound shops, you don't have to spend a lot of money. They can be rotated and replenished quite easily from these places too. It's also a great opportunity to learn a new skill or find a new hobby such as knitting, cross stitch, decoupage, macrame. Now are there any special rules to a bedtime box? It's a good idea to have the box exclusively for night time. If you allow it to be used at any time it becomes less special. Keep rotating the contents to avoid boredom. Doing this makes the box an exciting and interesting prospect to get out each night. If the child or young person wants to decorate the box, this can help them gain ownership of this part of the night time routine. They can be painted, covered in stickers, they can draw things on them, make mosaics, decoupage, they can stick magazine photos of favourite bands, cars, space pictures, they can wrap them in that wonderful holographic paper you can find in a card shop or they can just be covered in fluffy pom poms, or glitter. I've said that very quietly to avoid palpitations from parents. Many parents, especially those who have to work until quite late and come home during the bedtime routine say that they either tend to play with the children when they get home and wind them up when they've already been calmed down, or they just sit and watch telly with them. By joining in and being present at bed time box time we've heard repeatedly that it becomes a favourite part of the day. Parents tell us they bond better with their children, they discover what quality time actually

means and they learn more about their child in that half an hour than they thought possible. So when do we use them? When we're planning a programme we find out when a child falls asleep and work backwards an hour from that. Sometimes it might be quite late if there are sleep problems but we still need to work with the existing body clock. Now it's temporary and can eventually be gradually changed to become more appropriate, so an hour before a child's regular sleep time we'll come into the lounge. We'll lower the lights, maybe play some relaxing music, perhaps light a relaxing scent so over time the child will associate many eclectic sensory experiences that will trigger relaxation and winding down. This is the start of telling our body to make melatonin, our sleepy hormone. This is where we get the box out. We combine this box with having a sleepy snack, using foods that naturally contain clever chemicals and hormones that aid relaxation. Some examples are diary products, some fruits, nuts, lentils, pure cherry juice, peanut butter, turkey, oats, there are more but I'll leave you to discover them in your own time. We put the box away half an hour before sleep time to go up for a bath. This can also have a soporific effect and it's timed to coincide with the time the body naturally closes down for the night. If a bath causes stress to a child then we remove it from the nightly routine and look at an alternative such as a warm dressing gown and a cuddle. After a bath we get into bed. Younger children might enjoy a story, older ones might like to listen to an audio book, read to themselves, or just do a mindfulness session to help them drift off. Whatever you normally do here is important to keep up, it's more bonding time, and it helps a child feel secure. Once you've finished give them a kiss, tell them you love them and say it's time for sleep and leave the room. Gifting a child to learn to settle by themselves is something you won't regret long into the future.

And who on earth would have thought it that sweet dreams would get it sorted!

Zoe Salmon: Isn't it brilliant how such a simple idea can have such great impact. Thanks again to Helen. This podcast is part of a series with one aimed at schools and one for children. We also have a wonderful 30 minutes long audio play Sweet Dreams by Mike Kenny for our younger listeners and we hope you enjoy it too. Thanks for listening and remember, sleep tight and sweet dreams!

This podcast was brought to you by Tutti Frutti working with Naked Productions and partners The Sleep Charity. For more information visit www.tutti-frutti.org.uk and for more help with sleep visit www.thesleepcharity.org.uk

Alright, night night, lie down, sleep tight, nothing is as bad as it seems. Close your eyes, sweet dreams. Close your eyes, sweet dreams. Close your eyes, sweet dreams.