

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.

In my life I have found...

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, well being and for our children to thrive in school. 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 three amazing guests who are going to be talking today to help you think about how sleep is vital for children's attendance, attainment and most importantly, their well being. First I'd like to introduce you to Colin Espie who is the professor of sleep medicine at the University of Oxford where he is director of the experimental and clinical sleep research programme and clinical director of Oxford Online Programme in sleep medicine. Wow, I think it's fair to say that Colin knows everything about sleep and why we need it! Colin, over to you.

Colin Espie: Well thank you Zoe, it's great to be here today and great to be talking about sleep and why it matters so much. I've been qualified for about 40 years now working in clinical practice and in research and one of the first questions I was asked all those years ago is can you help me to sleep? I didn't have so much training on sleep and sleep disorders way back at the beginning but I became very interested in that topic and I want to think a little bit today with you all about what sleep is, why it matters, how it changes across a life course and how we can look after our sleep a little bit better. So what is this thing called sleep? It's not nice to have – you might say that's a strange idea, well it's a need to have. We need to have our sleep, it's lovely to have a nice sleep. But it's something we absolutely need and I think that's the first important thing to say. If you think about other essentials in life like clean drinking water, fresh air, good quality food, we need sleep just as much as we need these other things because they're absolutely essential – and not just to us but to the whole animal kingdom. Everyone has a sleep wake cycle. The second thing to say is that sleep is not a thing, it's not like parking the car at night and nothing happens, it's a very complex set of stages and phases, all of which have purposes. When we fall asleep at first we go into our deepest sleep in the first part of the night and then later on we have periods of lighter sleep

and interspersed with that are periods of something we call REM sleep – rapid eye movement sleep. That’s when we dream. So my point really here is to help you understand that sleep is something wonderfully complex, it’s something that is staged in ways that fit with our needs at different parts of our developmental cycle. And of course, across a life course we need different amounts of sleep. But let’s think first of all about why this really matters. What is it that sleep is doing for us? How is it delivering too us? Well, sleep is essential for lots of different things. Do you know people sometimes say things like a rest is as good as a sleep. I don’t know if you’ve heard that expression but it’s a common one, and of course having a rest is a great thing. It’s great to down tools, to stop work, to put our feet up, to have a bit of social time, to watch the television or whatever and all that restful activity is great relaxation but it doesn’t replace sleep. We can’t substitute rest for sleep and that is because it’s only during sleep that some very essential things happen. Let me give a few examples of those. Cells need to regenerate in order for us to be healthy and cell regeneration, that replacement, only takes place during sleep, it doesn’t take place during rest. The clearance of waste matter from the brain – you may think that’s an odd thing! – but that’s essential, we have to clear waste from everywhere in our body. That only happens during sleep. Proteins are synthesised, these are the building blocks of life, during sleep. Growth hormone which is essential, as the name suggests, for growth, only happens during sleep. So you can see that so many important, crucial things are sleep dependent and of course during the pandemic we’ve been very aware of what can happen when the world gets infected. Well, immune signalling or immune function is heavily dependent on sleep as well and then when one thinks of the more emotional and mental side to life, sleep is really important to what we call emotion regulation, for resetting our emotional state for the day time and helping us to encode all our experiences and our memories from during the day. When we’re studying we’re trying to learn things, the best thing we can do is have a period of sleep following a period of learning

because sleep consolidates what we've been learning much better than being awake for an equivalent period of time. So sleep is something that's essential, something that's quite complex and the complexity that I mentioned earlier on of these different stages and phases are all to do with the brain doing it's work to deliver these reasons why sleep matters to do all the physical and emotional and cognitive tasks for us. It's a truly wonderful and highly preserved process that we need. Part of our day, if you like, is our night, part of our 24 hours and an important part of our lives, indeed about a third of it, is spent asleep.

Now, if we think a little bit about sleep across the life course we realise that there are changes that have taken place. New born babies may sleep 18 hours a day. If you've got a new born baby you might think I wish! But actually they sleep rather a lot and certainly much more than adults, don't they. This is because we need an awful lot of sleep at that stage in our lives because there's so much new information, so much growth, so much development, so much learning that sleep becomes really a priority thing to help us mature and grow physically, emotionally and mentally. It's not until 6-12 months of age that we settle into a sleep and wake pattern with a major consolidated period at night and of course by the time we get to 4-5 and going to school we're losing that day time nap period. It's not common for a primary one kid to decide to have a nap during the day, it's expected that they will really have a wakeful day and then sleep well at night. So we can see a consolidation of what we call the circadian rhythm, that's the body clock that times when we sleep and when we wake in harmony with the light and dark cycle really across the whole of our lives. And then as adults of course we may sleep somewhere between 7-9 hours and of course it's a bit of a range there isn't it. Sometimes people will say to me well how much sleep should I get? And I would say to them probably somewhere between 7-9 hours if you're an adult and they say well that's not very specific is it? But then I would say to them well, what shoe size are you? And they would look at me and say well, how's that relevant? And I would say to them well you

wouldn't expect there to be an exact value for the size of your feet as an adult, you would expect it to differ from individual to individual within a range depending upon individual differences. So it's very important therefore to recognise that there are individual differences in our sleep requirements just as there are in other aspects of ourselves. So one of the best pieces of advice I can give to anyone is to try and figure out your sleep size, how much sleep is it that you personally need and do that by trial and error to find out whether you can sleep a bit more or whether you can manage to sleep a little bit less and figure out the amount of time you should be in bed. What you want to do is try and make your sleep efficient, that is the proportion of the time that you're in bed wants to be maybe 100% - well, nobody's going to sleep 100% of the night - but if you're in bed for 8 hours and sleep 6 hours that's 75% and you've got two hours of wakefulness. You might have been better if you're only going to sleep 6 hours to spend 7 hours in bed and the proportion of your night you're managing to sleep through is increasing. But the other thing you can experiment with to try and get it right is to think about the timing of your sleep. You're probably familiar with this idea of being a night owl or a morning lark. Of course a lot of people are neither extreme but the timing of our sleep is another aspect of individual differences just as the amount of sleep we need varies from person to person, so the time you're asleep varies from person to person because some people are rather more late sleepers and some people are rather more early sleepers. I think it's great to have these individual differences and it's not something we should worry about, it's something we should figure out and work within.

Now, when it comes to thinking about young people and their sleep, sleep is often a bit of a battleground at home. It's a time when we're trying to help young people to settle, we're trying to help them become independent in their care for themselves at bedtime, during the night and upon rising and of course different challenges emerge at different stages in that developmental cycle right the way through from the new born baby to the teenager who just

won't or can't get to sleep or won't or can't get up in the morning. So often this is a really important challenging time for parenting and an important and challenging time for the young person who's developing to become independent, taking responsibility for their own self care. Just as we look after young people in lots of other ways, it's important that we work with them and with their developmental cycles in trying to meet those sleep needs and to figure out their patterns. Of course, those of us who've got more than one child will realise that children vary just as I'm saying we vary and it's really important that we get clued into that. I think it's very important that sleep is something that's on the curriculum at schools, that we think about that along with other aspects of health and well being and in some ways it's a slightly easier topic I think to discuss because it's a little bit less stigmatised than some of the other health considerations that we talk about at school, which may be a little bit more confrontational for young people. Sleep is something that's part of conversation, oh I had a terrible sleep last night, oh I had a great sleep last night, or even saying how did you sleep last night?

So overall all those years ago, 40 years ago people were asking me can you help me to sleep? It's been a fascinating journey for me in my professional career to think about the importance of sleep, to think about it's complexity, to think about it's wonderful timing and regularity, to understand all the different reasons why it matters and to see that it's relevant right across the life course. So for young people, for their families and for professionals working with young people I think it's a really important topic for us all to be thinking about and I'm grateful for the opportunity to be on today to talk about this and to talk about how we can perhaps look after our sleep a little bit better.

Zoe Salmon: Thank you Colin, I learned so much and it's given me lots to think about. I'll just repeat that Twitter handle again for anybody who wishes to get in touch with you, it's

@ProfEspie. My next guests are going to explore some of the problems primary teachers and school staff face when they have children in class who they believe may be sleep deprived. I'm thrilled to invite the CEO of the Sleep Charity Vicky Dawson and Caroline Lister, year one teaching curriculum and progress lead and art coordinator from Hare Hills primary school in Leeds to discuss the issues that arise at school when sleep becomes a problem and what you might do to address this.

Vicky Dawson: Thanks Zoe, it's great to be here and talk about sleep. The Sleep Charity's mission is to support everyone to get a good night's sleep. Caroline, it's lovely to chat with you today and I'm really interested to hear about your experience as a teacher and how you find that sleep deprivation impacts on the children that you work with.

Caroline Lister: Hi there Vicky, lovely to talk to you as well! Obviously in the classroom we come across many children who are very tired a lot of the time and we find that directly impacts on how easy it is for them to learn, from their behaviour, from listlessness, the desire to join in with the lessons that we're offering. Often they're quite emotional, they struggle with friendships, but is there a difference between a tired child and somebody who's sleep deprived? Are there things that we should be looking out for?

Vicky Dawson: That's a really interesting question and sometimes we do go through periods of having a difficult night and we can be tired the next day but sleep deprivation can accumulate over a period of time so the children we often see at the charity are the children who've had weeks, if not months, or even years of poor quality and inadequate sleep. I think the things you've picked up on are so important because sleep deprivation impacts on so many different areas. I used to be a teacher and I'll be the first to admit that I didn't always

recognise some of the symptoms of sleep deprivation in the classroom because it is so far reaching like you said, emotional regulation, relationships with peers apart from concentrating and being able to consolidate learning.

Caroline Lister: So Vicky, what would you say from a teacher's point of view what are the benefits to a child's education of getting a really good night's sleep?

Vicky Dawson: There's so many benefits and I've got to be the first to admit that I didn't recognise them all when I was teaching. But certainly there's benefits in terms of children's emotional well being, so the emotional regulation is affected by sleep deprivation, concentration and we've only got to relate it to being an adult and we find it so much harder to concentrate if we're sleep deprived. One of the real interesting things and something I didn't know is there is a link between sleep deprivation and hyper activity so children's day time behaviour is negatively affected and it's not necessarily the child in the class who is presenting as overly tired, it could be the child in the class who's presenting as hyperactive. That may be a symptom in itself. And then of course there's knock on effects in terms of attendance. If we're sleep deprived our immune systems become compromised so children are much more likely to catch general colds, bugs, that kind of thing and lateness as well. If families are having difficulties around sleep it may impact in terms of them being able to get the child to school in the morning.

Caroline Lister: So really it's about everything!

Vicky Dawson: It's absolutely about everything yes. It's also about the parents as well, we want children to arrive at school and to be able to meet their full potential and the bottom line

is nobody can meet their full potential is they're suffering from sleep deprivation because it has so many negative impacts on our bodies and on our minds.

Caroline Lister: It's really quite huge isn't it.

Vicky Dawson: It's enormous. I think what we've got to recognise as well is if a child's not sleeping the parents, the carers, aren't sleeping and that has consequences too. It can reduce their capacity to put boundaries in place and be able to parent as effectively as they would be able to if they were getting adequate sleep. We've had families where they've been unable to work because they're so exhausted and it's led to financial implications and poverty in that way. It is absolutely a huge huge issue that really we need to be tackling at the earliest possible stage.

Caroline Lister: I know at school one of the things that is talked about when home visits happen when children are about to begin school are good sleep patterns and then we look at sleep again in early key stage two but do you feel that it's something that should be part and parcel of certainly primary education on a yearly basis? Is it something we should keep coming back to?

Vicky Dawson: I think it absolutely is and I think that professionals need to be educated around sleep because I know it was certainly something that was completely missed in my education and if I had the knowledge that I went on to gain the sleep issues that I face with my child were completely preventable and it's that knowledge that's so empowering. Then we know how to manage sleep difficulties, we know how to prevent them and children need to be educated at the earliest possible opportunity and they need to be educated about the

positives that sleep can bring because quite often young children think sleep is boring and as adults we use language around sleep and we use sleep as a sanction or even sleep deprivation as a reward. You can stay up late if you behave well! What does that teach our children? So I think we've got to be empowering the nation with sleep education, from parents, carers, professionals to children at every possible stage and opportunity.

Caroline Lister: Is there training out there for teachers?

Vicky Dawson: We've developed training called Sleep Champion Training which at the moment is aimed at secondary schools but we are going on to develop primary school focussed training as well because our vision at the sleep charity is that every school should have a sleep champion so that sleep education is filtered through the sleep champion and we can provide resources that are evidence based and we can also provide the sleep champions with appropriate training as well so that they're sharing the right kind of education because there's a lot of misinformation out there about sleep. It's an unregulated industry and therefore some of the information that is provided isn't accurate, it isn't the best quality and this is part of our mission to make sure we are providing excellent information that's supported by our advisory board.

Caroline Lister: That sounds like a fabulous idea. Many of the families are large and living in quite small housing. That presents all sorts of problems in itself and then on top of that we have language difficulties in terms of getting information across to families. Have you got any advice on how we can begin to help educate our families and to help their children have better sleep patterns?

Vicky Dawson: First of all sleep difficulties don't discriminate so anybody can have a sleep issue and we've worked with families who have been the most affluent families and we've worked with the most disadvantaged families and I think the thing to recognise is that sleep issues can become deeply entrenched, they can take time to resolve and what we need to do as a starting point is to get conversations going about sleep because as a family if your child has got sleep issues you can feel quite judged as if you are doing something wrong and it is your parenting. So what we want to do is to break down those barriers, discuss sleep, empower them with the information and when we are working with families where there are crowded houses we will take an approach whereby we look at each case very individually and we look at what can be done, so we have to get very creative at times and talk about how we can partition rooms, how everybody has got different sleep needs. That includes siblings who may be sharing rooms and once you share information with families about things like sleep association so the things we need to fall asleep well at night they start to recognise that actually they've got children who are sharing a room who have different sleep needs. One may need darkness, one may need light and then we can start to put in strategies to address each of these. Of course there are cultural differences as well around sleep. One of the things that's really really key around the work that we do is putting families right at the centre so actually listening to the families, understanding their approach, their culture, their situation and then working supportively with them to make the changes that fit in with their cultural beliefs, their parenting styles, the housing they may be in and sometimes these are very small changes that we can make as a starting point for us to then go on and build. But the key thing our research has found is it's the support that is important, having someone to listen, that non judgemental support is incredibly important when families are trying to make changes.

Caroline Lister: It's absolutely fascinating everything that you've been talking about and I also think that's a really positive way forward for us to help our families is acknowledging all those social differences and that there isn't a right way or a wrong way necessarily but moving forward in a positive way. I think as well many of our children are really struggling at the moment as a result of the pandemic and the different routines that they've kept for such a long time, is there anything that you could suggest we could put into place right now to help them with that?

Vicky Dawson: The pandemic's had a huge impact on sleep nationally, not just children, young people as well but also adults. I think one of the really interesting things Caroline is that you may find that some children slept better while they were out of school, so parents have been sometimes reporting this and that may be children who've been anxious about school, quite often children who've had a diagnosis of autism for example have been sleeping better but now that school's restarted there's difficulty getting their body clock back on track, getting up in the morning. And then other children have found that their sleep has become later and later because of lockdown, because of the fact that routine may not have been as in place as it was, because of increased screen time. There's a link between using screens and sleep issues so there's some research that suggests that the sleep hormone may not be released as effectively if children are looking at screens in the hour before bedtime. But actually they've been forced to do that because of accessing social situations, entertainment, whatever reasons, accessing education and also there's been reduced exercise. So lots and lots of reasons why it's happened. I think the most important thing is to acknowledge it and to almost normalise it that yes people have been struggling and it is really difficult to get sleep back on track and what we need to do is to get back into routine as quickly as possible but we all have a circadian rhythm which is our internal body clock and when these become

disrupted, so children who might not be falling asleep until 11 o'clock at night and even later we can't suddenly expect to put them to bed at 7pm and for them to fall asleep so what I would say is actually do things gradually, start to move that bedtime back 15 minutes every three nights until we get to a more reasonable time and also educate families around the fact that they can't catch up on this sleep at the weekend and if they let them have the lengthy lie ins on Saturday and Sunday that's going to reduce the sleep drive which means by the time night time comes they're not going to be tired and that is going to further escalate the problem because that bedtime is going to be delayed. This is why routine is so so important. So sharing that information is really key so that families know what to do and have a starting point.

Caroline Lister: Thanks very much Vicky. All of that information is fabulous. I know our school would definitely want to have a sleep champion and take you up on any of the training that you have to offer and I think as a population we all probably need some help with sleep, I certainly think that I do as well!

Vicky Dawson: Yeah I think everybody is really struggling and I will put my hands up and say I've struggled too and that is having sleep knowledge! But one of the things is I've known what to do to get things back on track. Sometimes just normalising the fact that at times we do go through difficult periods with sleep because we're anxious, things have changed, but we've also got the tools to put things back in place and that's really reassuring and really helpful. That's the stand that we have as a charity, that we don't want to put additional strains on families. So quite often they'll say we've tried everything and we acknowledge that because they probably have but what we want them to do is try an approach whereby they're using the science of sleep to then identify why the sleep issues are occurring

and then to use the knowledge around the circadian rhythm and melatonin production and calming activities and push all that knowledge together and put it into place and a lot of the strategies will be the same as ones they've previously tried but it's about the timing of it as well and carrying it on for at least two weeks so that they can see the changes because often children will resist change – as you will know in the class room! It's the same with sleep and as a parent you interpret that as oh it's not working so I'll stop doing that, whereas actually they just need support in coaching through it and the success rate with behavioural sleep intervention is pretty high – well over 80% success rates.

Caroline Lister: So it's the support that's key in this?

Vicky Dawson: It absolutely is. It is so difficult when you are tired to keep those boundaries in place and I think knowing that a sleep practitioner, a sleep champion is going to be getting in touch keeps you a little bit more accountable as well and this is what the families have shared with us in our research projects. It also means we can keep assessing, reevaluating, are the strategies that we're using appropriate and right? And it is that support that is so vitally important and having time to give the families that level of support too. Caroline I know you mentioned that sleep is discussed at transition and key stage two, I'm really interested to know though whether sleep has the same profile as things like nutrition and exercise in schools?

Caroline Lister: It absolutely doesn't and from listening to you today Vicky it really should. I think we need much more help. As teachers we need to be given more training about it and where can we get that training?!

Vicky Dawson: I completely agree, and part of our offering is to provide training to professionals so they can speak confidently about sleep and so they can pass on information to families and it's really important as well to know how to signpost families on when they do need sleep support. So people can log onto our website, whether that is professionals who are looking for training or whether it's families who are looking to find out whether there's sleep support in their area, or to access downloadable materials that are available. The website address is www.sleepcharity.org.uk.

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

Zoe Salmon: Isn't it striking just how important sleep is for our children? So it's great to know that there are resources at the sleep charity to help us. Thanks again to Vicky and Caroline for that insightful conversation. This podcast is part of a series with one aimed at families 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 our 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.

