

Sleep Support Service

Year 1, April 2020 – March 2021



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Introduction

Koala NW identified in 2019 that many families we were working with in our Family Support service needed support around sleep issues their children were experiencing. After some research it was clear that no organisation in Wirral or Cheshire West were offering this type of support, and as a service we knew this was a gap that needed filling.

Sleep problems are very common, but are more likely to occur among children with additional needs. In typically developing children sleep problems and insufficient sleep can result in daytime sleepiness, learning problems and behavioural issues such as hyperactivity, inattentiveness and aggression

According to The Sleep Council (May 2020), 70% of children under the age of 16 are having disturbed sleep. Sleep is especially important for children as it directly impacts mental and physical development. Studies have shown that children who regularly get an adequate amount of sleep have improved attention, behaviour, learning, memory, and overall mental and physical health. Not getting enough sleep can lead to high blood pressure, obesity and even depression.

In response to the identified need we looked at what sleep support was being offered in other areas and training available to skill up our staff team to support local families. In October 2019 one of our Family Support staff attended specific training to become an accredited Sleep Practitioner, this training qualified them to offer one-one support to families that had children age 1-18 years with sleep issues. At Koala NW the age range we focus on is children age 1-11yrs.

The aim for introducing this service was to reach those families who were experiencing interrupted sleep which was affecting their, and their children's, emotional health wellbeing, physical health and the family dynamic as a whole. We know sleep deprivation can affect; emotional health, physical health, learning & development, family relationships, concentration and in extreme cases an ability to function day to day.

By March 2020 two more staff members had completed the accredited training as Sleep Practitioners and they were able to begin the much-needed work with local families. In March 2021 we had another staff member complete their training so we now have a team of four Koala NW accredited Sleep Practitioners supporting families in Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston.



Delivery Model

We have delivered to date **312** one-one sessions to parents, working with them to change routines an implement positive bedtime routine.

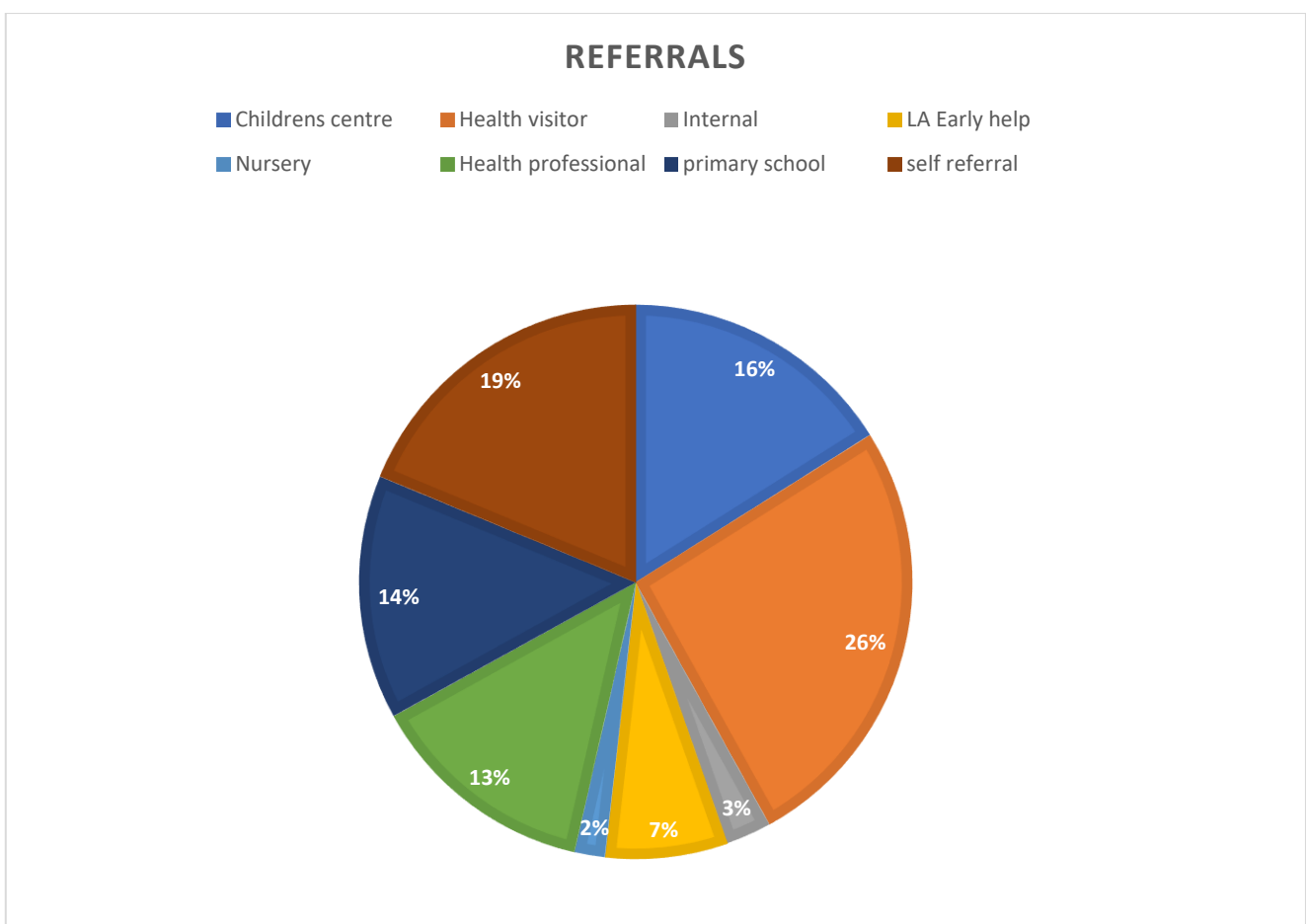
The programme consists of an initial meeting to discuss what problems the parents have identified with their child's sleep, Practitioners then use this information to design a bespoke sleep support plan which they share with the parent they are then supported to implement the changes for up to 6 weeks if needed this is done using support calls to encourage and empower them with making the changes in routine and around bedtime.

We originally planned to deliver the programme in the home face to face but have had to adapt due to the pandemic.

Since April 2020 we have delivered support virtually and given parents an option of phone calls and virtual planforms using What'sApp video or zoom sessions. Parents have found the contact to be valuable and the majority have engaged well. At the beginning we did have a couple who declined online and phone support preferring to wait for face to face to return however as the pandemic continued more and more parents are happy to have the virtual support. We now have a regular waiting list with up to 30 parents waiting for sleep support at any one time.

Referrals

Since April 2020 we have received **118** referrals, 21 of these families are currently on our waiting list for a Sleep Practitioner to start working with them.



Outcomes

The following data shows how the programme has had a positive effect upon families in the following areas-

Improved settling at bedtime - 100% of parents reported that their child was settling easier than before the intervention.

Improvement in night waking - 90.9% of parents said their child's waking at night had decreased or even stopped following the intervention.

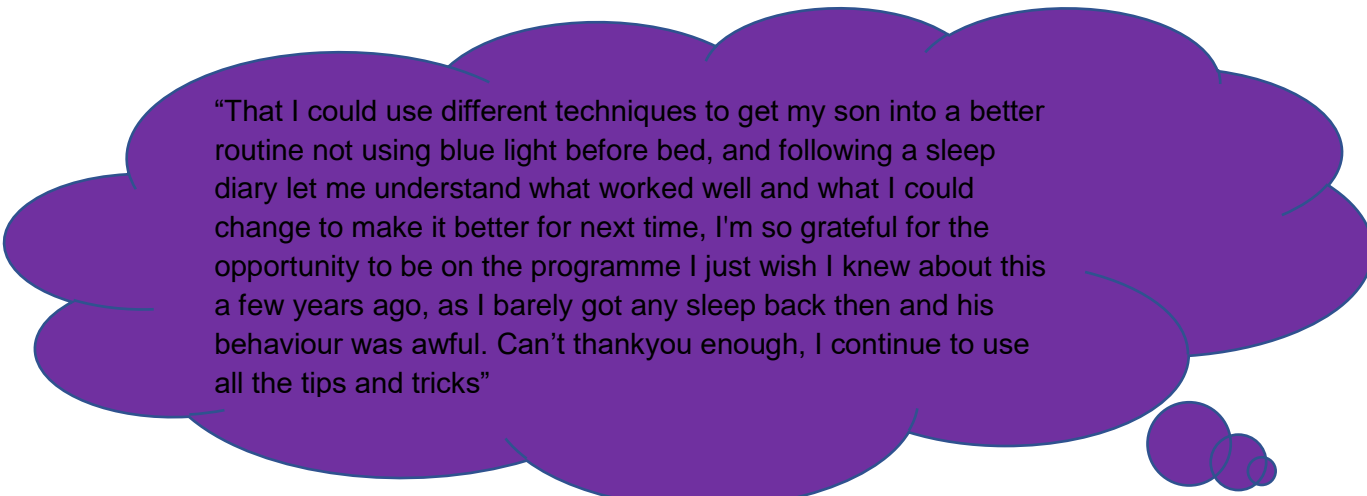
Childs behaviour improved – 100% of parents said their child's behaviour had shown improvement following the intervention.

Child's Emotional Health & Wellbeing- 94.4% of parents reported they had seen an improvement in their children following the intervention.

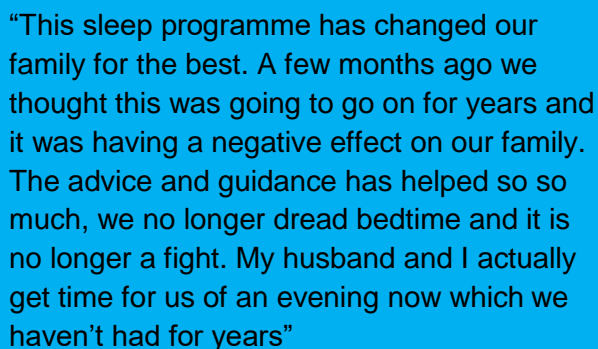
Parental Emotional Health & Wellbeing – 95.8% of parents identified their emotional health and wellbeing had improved following the intervention.

Improved parental sleep – 91.7% of parents identified that their own sleep had improved following the intervention.

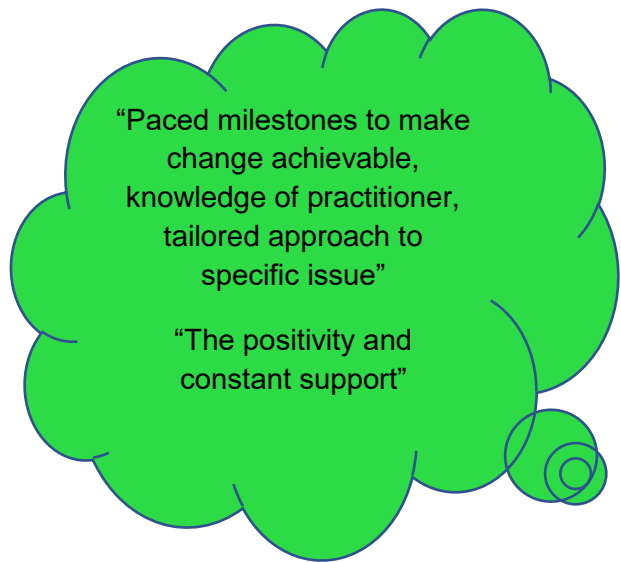
Parents feedback – We asked what did you find most helpful about the programme?



“That I could use different techniques to get my son into a better routine not using blue light before bed, and following a sleep diary let me understand what worked well and what I could change to make it better for next time, I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be on the programme I just wish I knew about this a few years ago, as I barely got any sleep back then and his behaviour was awful. Can't thank you enough, I continue to use all the tips and tricks”



“This sleep programme has changed our family for the best. A few months ago we thought this was going to go on for years and it was having a negative effect on our family. The advice and guidance has helped so so much, we no longer dread bedtime and it is no longer a fight. My husband and I actually get time for us of an evening now which we haven't had for years”



“Paced milestones to make change achievable, knowledge of practitioner, tailored approach to specific issue”

“The positivity and constant support”



“ Practitioner was amazing. So supportive and always pointing out the positives which helped me see the improvement being made. Can't thank her enough, she's saved my sanity! It's made bedtime so much less stressful, before I was anxious and dreaded the 2-hour chaos of bedtime, now it's a calm and happy time and I don't dread it. It's made a difference to daytime behaviours too, and my girls get on so much better too.”

What parents say about our programme –

What a brilliant, brilliant service! I hoped when I got in touch I might get a few tips to make the bedtime routine more bearable. Never did I imagine I'd not only get that, but it would mean a whole calmer evening routine, improvements to meal times, reduction in screen time and a reduction in the amount of nights I ended up with a 3 year old in my bed. The calm down activities have been such a huge success; in 6 weeks I'm already noticing a difference in my son's reading and maths with a daily opportunity for some quiet learning.

My husband and I are less agitated at bedtime and calmer ourselves which has improved our sleep too. I feel really empowered and the weekly calls of support were great for my confidence. Most of the time, bedtime is now an enjoyable experience instead of the daily battle it used to be. Such an enormous difference in a short space of time and excited for our sleep to continue improving. I have been recommending this excellent service to so many people across Wirral now. I feel incredibly fortunate to live in an area where this service is offered to families like mine for free. It's been brilliant and all our household is very thankful.

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The personalised plan given based upon my sons sleep diary - tailored around our routine

Weekly texts and calls to see how we were getting on

Always a friendly voice at the end of the phone to provide very much need support/reassurance and advice at a time when your most vulnerable and sleep deprived

Great tips/ ideas to help improve sleep routine and behaviours

Sleepy foods !!! Who knew ... but I swear by bananas and yogurts

The support which was shown at the times where I felt like I was getting no where really got me through, if it wasn't for the guidance and help from A I would still be probably be having sleepless nights. She was very easy and friendly to get along with and one of the main things I was worried about was being judged but there was no judgment and just so supportive in the goal we was trying to achieve with our son.

Fantastic service ... that really helped our sons sleep routine/ behaviours, provided us as parents with a different approach to managing sleep routines that we continue to utilise every day.

What next?

Due to uptake and the interest in the sleep service we took the opportunity to reach more parents and trained our Sleep Practitioners to deliver Sleep Better courses which includes supporting parents whose children have received a diagnosis or waiting to receive one of ASD or ADHD. Practitioners also work with children with physical disabilities as we work using the behavioural approach not a medical one and this approach has been proven to work for all children.

From April 2021 we will be offering Sleep Better courses across Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston. Each course runs for 5 weeks and lasts 1.5hrs per week, we have space for 10 parents this ensures they are supported in their learning.

The amount we have achieved as a service is incredible and made even more so that the referrals we have received to date have come via word of mouth with very little advertising of the service.

We hope to secure funding for our Koala NW Sleep Support Service to continue to support local families.

Below are some case studies which show in a little more detail the support families receive.

Case Study 1

Child age 3.5 not settling, taking up to 2 hrs to settle and has to have mum sleep next to him. Will wake through the night and get into mum & dads' bed. Has been known to be awake for a number of hours. He will negotiate with his parents and say if you give me my tablet I will settle down, they have been known to do this. In order to settle him as they have another child who needs them as well.

Introduced a structured routine which meant no electrical stimulation one hour before bed. A calm hour as part of the routine and no negotiations around sleep time. Supported mum to be the parent and be consistent in her approach.

WK 1 – mum was shocked by how well he responded to the new routine and the first few nights he went to bed without much resistance, the last few of the week were more difficult as he was waking again and mum was not always consistent with returning him to his own bed and he was pushing the boundaries mum had put in place. Mum was reminded that this was expected and to stay calm and consistent.

WK2 – Mum was honest and discussed she was losing enthusiasm for the plan and it can be difficult to keep it up, she discussed they had missed calm time on occasion and when this had happened she had seen a difference in behaviour when he had not had it he had become more angry and defiant before bed. Mum was encouraged to stick with the plan and was given different options around calm time and different activities so long as they were not electronic.

WK3- mum reported that things were going really well, he had slept though in his own bed for the past 6 nights, he wasn't happy about going to bed but was asleep within 5 mins of them leaving the room as he was self-settling without mum having to be lying next to him. Dad who was working away had come home and was shocked by how well he was going to bed and sleep within 5 mins of having a story.

WK4 – Things had reverted back he was running about jumping on beds getting into their bed. We discussed what had changed, mum was honest and said they hadn't followed the plan and calm time was rushed if it happened at all and that he had returned to nursery but not with his normal group or teacher. Discussed how lack of routine and consistency can affect him and especially as

he had returned to the education setting he had been out of for so long. Advised they revert back to the sleep plan to give him some structure.

WK5- mum turned it around again and sleep time is much calmer again he is sleeping in his room all night not getting out of bed or into mum & dads. Calm time is happening again and he is enjoying it.

Mum & dad understand how consistency is key a routine works for their child. Mum feels sleep is 100% better than when they started and she is happy with the progress they have made, they have the tools to continue to support their child to get a good night sleep.

Parents feedback -

Practitioner and all of her amazing advice and knowledge, she has helped our family more than she will ever know. She was always available if I needed her and she was so lovely, I felt really at ease speaking with her and felt like I could ask/speak to her about anything.

Case Study 2

Parent , 3 children oldest diagnosed as having ASD . Oldest age 8 years not sleeping, settling around 2am most nights. Parent discussed “meltdowns” and behaviour is worse than it has ever been.

Once asleep child wakes around 5am and gets out of bed to play/watch TV and won't settle down again. Child is getting 4 hrs sleep on a good night. Professionals have offered melatonin but mum did not want to go down the route.

Affecting parents mental health & wellbeing, parent “dreads” the “bedtime battle” and has other children to settle. Day time behaviour is an issue where the parent cannot get the child to do anything, the child is “always angry” and tired and has been known to fall asleep in school.

Discussed using a behavioural approach and being consistent is key. We also inform parents that sleep could get worse before it gets better or there could be a regression after a few weeks but it will get better if they stay consistent.

Sleep plan given which included no blackcurrant towards bedtime and having calm time an hour before bed with mum.

Mum used the rapid return technique and also removed the games console from downstairs so there was no chance the child could get up and play on it, the remote was also removed.

WK1 - Mum followed the plan and the child was in bed by 9.30pm and asleep by 10pm and having to wake them the following morning.

By the end of the first week child was in bed by 8.30pm and asleep by 9pm. When the child tried to put the TV mum used distractions of calm time and it worked. No waking in the early hours.

WK2- easier getting child to bed mum reported she feels the child is “less angry” and because of this she feels less anxious about bedtime. Did get up around 5am a few times to try to play the computer counsel but mum returned to bed and the child responded positively.

By week 4 mum discussed she had noticed a reduction of violence towards mum and “fewer meltdowns”.

Each week mum felt more at ease with the new routine and at times it was difficult but she stuck with it and has seen a real difference in behaviour and her child's sleep patterns, she is able to

enjoy some time alone in the evening which she wasn't getting and morning routines have improved greatly.

Parents feedback;

It's like she is a different child at times, she listens and is calmer she even reminds me its time to get in bed a read a book together.

Case Study 3

Mum contacted the service because she was exhausted. She has three children and is breastfeeding the youngest who is four-month-old. Dad works nights so mum has the children alone when he is at work.

The middle child was 2.5yrs old and was taking hours to settle at night mum would sit in the bedroom with the baby for around 2hrs until the child was asleep. She would sleep for a few hours then wake and come into mum & dads' bed where she would not settle but would use a high-pitched scream. Mum was not resting as when one was asleep the baby needed feeding. Mum could not continue this way and was willing to try anything that may help.

Completed session to see what bedtime looked like, what routine was already in place, what was working well and what wasn't. Family also completed a 7 nights worth of sleep diary so we could identify any patterns.

I noticed that there was no calm time before bed they tended to have tea before dad went to work then mum would attempt to get all children ready and in bed at the same time, this lead to playing and becoming excited when it should be wind down time , mum would then have to sit in the bed room for 2 hrs plus at times whilst feeding the youngest.

A sleep plan was written specifically for the family and their needs, we introduced calm time and gave mum the tools to implement a positive bedtime routine, mum was made aware that it wouldn't be easy and she would need to really dig deep and embrace and face the challenges that this would involve. The main requirement needed by mum & dad was consistency and staying calm in the face of challenging behaviour which can come from implementing a routine.

Implementing this sleep plan has been hard on the family, the child has fought them every step of the way and there were times when mum contacted me to say she couldn't do this any longer as it wasn't working. By concentrating on the positives and getting mum & dad to see these positives however small gave them the confidence to continue when they thought they couldn't go on anymore.

It took 7 weeks of hard work on the parents' side and weekly support calls and texts reassuring them that what they were doing would pay off, they did see quite a dramatic change. They went from taking 2 hrs to settle with mum in the room to self-settling by herself, to waking through the night screaming and getting in mums bed jumping around and not settling to sleeping straight through and if waking be put back to bed with no issues at all.

The outcome being mum is able to have some time on her own and with her husband and knowing she can settle to sleep without worrying that she will not get a restful night.

Parents feedback;

The positivity and constant support and constant support got me through it I felt like giving up at time and without the support and encouragement telling me I could do this I may have given up.....I'm glad I didn't as the house and bedtime is so much calmer now. I can't thank her enough.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT OUR SLEEP SERVICE PLEASE CONTACT US

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<https://koalanw.co.uk/koala-sleep-service>

