



The Better Sleep for Carers Program
Week 4 Handout: **Troubleshooting Sleep Plans**

A Gentle Reminder

Night-time disruption can be one of the hardest parts of caring - especially when you're already tired. This week is not about blaming you or your relative. It's about learning a calm, practical way to notice patterns, test small changes, and support safer, more settled nights over time.

Progress here is usually trial and error. That's not a sign something isn't working - that *is* the work.

What We'll Do This Week

We will:

- Review sleep diaries
- Explore what it means to troubleshoot a sleep plan
- Practise taking a curious (not judgemental) stance toward night-time behaviour
- Look at common reasons people struggle to sleep at night
- Break troubleshooting into simple steps you can repeat
- Generate new strategies together in small groups
- Learn a CBT skill for changing how we respond to challenging behaviour
- Do a Stretching for Stress practice
- Introduce this week's task: a Behaviour Record (alongside the sleep diary)
- Summarise key points and plan what to try next week

Before we start: a few things to hold in mind

As you've completed your sleep diaries, you may have noticed patterns - in your sleep, your relative's sleep, or in what happens at night. That noticing is the first stage of troubleshooting.

A few guiding principles:

- We can't directly control another person's behaviour, but we *can* change the environment, the routine, and our responses - and that often changes what happens next.
- A "behaviour" can be something your relative does or something you do (for example, how you respond when woken).

- Consistency matters more than intensity.
- This is usually slow change, not overnight change.
- Aim for small, specific, realistic goals — this builds confidence and momentum.

Taking a curious position

When you're exhausted, it's natural to feel frustrated, helpless, or ask "why is this happening again?"

Curiosity doesn't mean you approve of what's happening - it means you gently ask:

- *What might be driving this?*
- *What tends to happen just before?*
- *What does my relative seem to need in that moment?*
- *What do I tend to do - and what happens next?*

Curiosity helps you get to the root of the pattern faster - which supports better sleep sooner.

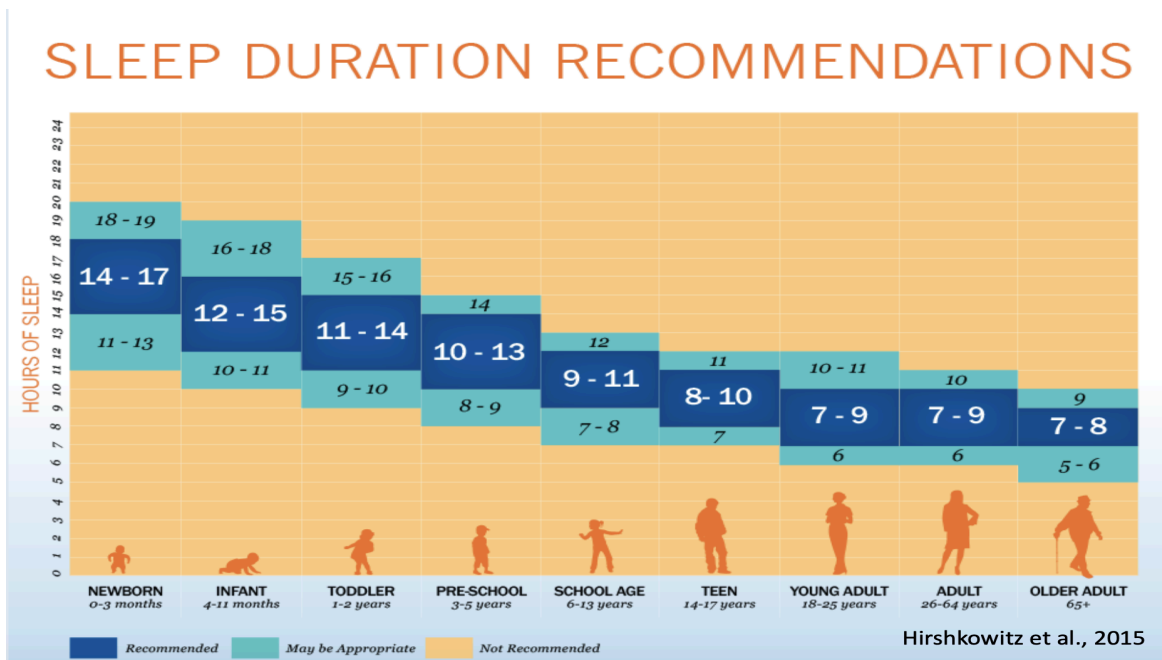
Understanding night-time behaviour: common reasons

People may struggle at night for many reasons, including:

- Confusion on waking (not knowing the time, trying to start the day, returning to old routines)
- Pain, discomfort, toileting needs, digestive symptoms, or mobility issues
- Medication effects or side effects
- Changes in melatonin and the body clock, especially in dementia
- Too much daytime sleep or too little daytime activity
- Hunger, thirst, temperature, or an unfamiliar environment

- Anxiety, fear, loneliness, or needing reassurance

Often it's not one "cause" - it's a mix. The goal is not perfect certainty; it's to identify the most likely drivers and test small changes.



Troubleshooting: A Simple 3-Step Process

When something keeps happening at night, we can work through:

Step 1: Identify the target behaviour

Be specific. For example:

- “Wakes and gets dressed at 2am”
- “Calls out repeatedly after going to bed”
- “I lie awake for an hour worrying after being woken”

Decide: do we want to reduce it, increase something else, or change the response?

Step 2: Look for triggers and patterns

Ask:

- When does it happen?
- What usually comes right before?
- What seems to soothe or worsen it?
- What is the environment like (light, noise, temperature)?
- What happened during the day (naps, activity, stimulation, meals)?

Step 3: Choose one small strategy to test

Pick one change at a time so you can tell what helps.

Then track it in your Behaviour Record and sleep diary.

A CBT skill: changing how we respond (the 5-step thought record)

Challenging behaviour can trigger strong thoughts and feelings - especially at night. CBT helps us pause and choose a more helpful response.

Try this 5-step process:

1. Describe the situation (just the facts)
2. Notice your thoughts (“This will never end”, “I can’t cope”, “They’re doing it on purpose”)
3. Notice feelings + body (anger, fear, sadness, tension, racing heart)

4. Take a curious stance and offer an alternative thought
 - “This is a dementia/sleep issue, not intentional.”
 - “This is hard - and I can take one step at a time.”
 - “What need might be underneath this?”
5. Notice what shifts (even slightly)

This isn't about forcing positivity. It's about finding a steadier, kinder frame that helps you respond with more clarity in the moment.

Strategies You Might Test

(Choose one or two that fit your situation.)

- Keep caffeine earlier in the day
- Protect a steady routine (wake time, meals, wind-down)
- Increase daytime light + activity
- Reduce late naps (or shorten them)
- Review pain/toileting comfort and discuss with a clinician where needed
- Adjust evening light/screen exposure
- Create a night-time reassurance plan (soft light, familiar objects, a calming script)
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark, quiet (with a small night light if helpful)

Stretching for Stress

You can do this standing or seated - whichever is safest and most comfortable.

1. Take a slow Signal Breath in... pause... and exhale gently.
2. Repeat once more - exhale as if you're letting tension drain out.
3. Reach arms out to the sides... soften shoulders... and release.
4. Reach arms forward... feel the upper back stretch... and release.
5. Reach up... lengthen gently... and release.
6. Roll shoulders back 3 times... then forward 3 times.
7. Shrug shoulders up... and let them drop (3 times).
8. Finish with one slow breath in... and a longer breath out.

Before: rate your tension 1–10 _____

After: rate your tension 1–10 _____

What do you notice? _____

This Week's Task

1. Continue the sleep diary - Complete each morning (paper or Google Form).
2. Add the Behaviour Record (found at the end of this handout)
3. Complete when a target night-time behaviour happens (or the next morning if needed).

Thought Record Template (5 steps)

(Use when your own thoughts/feelings spike in the moment.)

Situation (facts): _____

Thoughts: _____

Feelings/body: _____

Curious reframe (more helpful thought): _____

Feelings now (if different): _____

Take-Home Messages

- Troubleshooting is not a one-off fix - it's a repeatable process
- Curiosity helps you find patterns and reduce stress responses
- Choose one change at a time so you can learn what helps
- Your response and the environment are powerful levers
- Small, consistent experiments can create meaningful improvements

Next Week

- Reviewing what you tried and what you learned
- Refining your relative's plan
- Deepening understanding of night-time activity

- Stretching and relaxation to support resilience

See you next week.

Night-time Plan (Keep By the Bed)

Purpose: A simple, calm guide for when sleep is disrupted. Work down the steps in order.

1) Pause first (30–60 seconds)

- Take 3 slow Signal Breaths (in through nose, longer out through mouth).
- Remind yourself: *“This is hard, and I can take it one step at a time.”*

2) Check safety and comfort

Ask yourself quietly:

- Is anyone in danger? Yes No → If yes, make it safe first.
- Do they need: Toilet Drink Pain relief Temperature change Blanket/comfort item?
- Use a soft night light, gentle voice, slow movements.

3) Gentle reassurance (1–2 minutes)

Say one simple, repeated message (choose one):

- “It’s night-time. You are safe. Let’s rest.”
- “I’m here. You can lie down.”
- “We’ll start the day in the morning.”

Avoid long explanations or arguments about the time.

4) Guide back to bed

- Offer a sip of water or a quick toilet visit if needed.
- Help them settle with: soft music, familiar object, or hand on shoulder.
- Dim lights again before leaving the room.

5) If they don't settle (after ~15–20 mins)

Choose one calm option:

- Sit quietly in another chair in the room.
- Step out briefly, then return.
- Do a short calming activity together (slow breathing, gentle stretching).

6) If YOU can't sleep

- Leave the bedroom for 15–20 minutes.
- Do something non-stimulating (dim light, tea, audiobook, or reading).
- Return to bed only when sleepy.

7) Morning reset (for tomorrow night)

- Get daylight within 30 minutes of waking.
- Do one gentle movement.
- Keep naps short and early if needed.
- Dim lights after dinner.

Quick reminders

- Curiosity over judgement: “What might they need?”
- Consistency beats perfection.
- One change at a time.

Optional: your personal notes

What usually helps us most:

What to avoid at night:

Emergency/medical concerns to watch for:

(One record per incident. Keep it brief - a few lines is enough.)

Date: _____ Time: _____

A) What happened? (facts only)

What did I observe?

B) What was happening just before? (possible triggers)

- Light / noise Screen/TV Toileting Pain/discomfort
 Hunger/thirst Temperature Dream/confusion Other: _____

Notes:

C) What did I do? (my response)

- Reassured verbally Guided back to bed Offered drink/toilet
 Turned lights on Stayed calm/quiet Redirected attention
 I felt overwhelmed/raised voice Other: _____

D) What happened next? (outcome)

- Settled within 10 mins Settled within 30 mins Did not settle
 I settled back to sleep I struggled to return to sleep

Notes:

E) What might this behaviour be communicating? (curious guess)

- Confusion Fear Pain Need toilet Habit/routine
 Under-stimulated by day Over-stimulated by evening Other: _____

F) One small strategy to test next time

- Earlier light/activity Shorter nap Dimmer evening
 Calmer wind-down Night reassurance script Check comfort/toileting
 Other: _____