

Establishing Good Sleep Habits

(Information adapted from www.behavior-consultant.com and www.babycenter.com)

Lack of sleep in children causes an increase in behavioral problems, irritability, accidents and injuries. It can also have a negative impact on social relationships, school performance and in extracurricular activities.



Ideally:

- Children ages 2-4 need an afternoon nap (1-3 hrs) and 11 hours of sleep at night.
- Children ages 4-6 need 12 hours of sleep (once they stop taking an afternoon nap).
- School age children need between 9.5 – 11 hours of sleep.

“Sleep deprivation can cause daytime hyperactivity and decrease in focused attention. This can be mistaken for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or other behavior disorders.”- National Institutes of Health

What You Can Do To Help

1. Pick and Stick to a Set Bedtime: Put your child to bed at the same time every night– ideally 7:30 to 8:00pm (depending on the age of your child). This will help keep your child’s internal clock stay on track and make it easier to sleep at bedtime. Staying up to late or going to bed at a different time each night will cause your child to become overtired which will actually make it harder for your child to fall asleep.
2. Develop a CONSISTENT Bedtime Routine: Establish a nighttime routine which consists of a few soothing activities such as taking a bath, changing into pajamas and reading a book. The entire routine should take about 30-45 minutes. Make after-dinner playtime a relaxing time. Too much activity close to bedtime can keep your child awake and make bedtime more challenging.
3. Avoid giving your child anything with caffeine less than six hours before bedtime.
4. Don’t allow “screen time” (TV., video games, computer) before bed. (Television and computer games changes brain wave patterns and can interfere with sleep in a variety of ways.) Children should not have televisions in their bedrooms.
5. Address Fears: It is normal for preschoolers to have fears, such a fear of the dark or “monsters” under the bed. Use a nightlight or a hall light left on.

Talk to your pediatrician if you think your child may have sleep apnea (loud snoring, irregular breathing/chest movements).

For more information:

- *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child* by Marc Weissbluth
- *Take Charge of Your Child's Sleep: The All-in-One Resource for Solving Sleep Problems in Kids and Teens* by Judith A. Owens and Jodi A. Mindell