

Who Should Use This Guide?

Regular sleep is an important aspect of managing mood and behavior. Poor sleep may result in your child being moody, irritable, and having difficulty tolerating frustration. Children who do not get enough sleep are also more likely to have behavior problems, such as hyperactivity and noncompliance. Adequate sleep sets children up for success in the classroom as poor sleep can result in problems with attention, memory, decision making, reaction time, and creativity, all of which are important in school. Many parents are unclear about what is considered an adequate amount of sleep their child at a given age. It is also common for parents to have concerns that children have significant difficulties falling asleep, exhibit bedtime refusal, have frequent night awakenings, and nightmares. Many of these behaviors are common among children and can often resolve quickly when consistent expectations for sleep are created. Speak to your child’s physician if your child has difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, snores, experiences unusual awakenings, or has sleep problems that are causing disruption during the day.

Tips for Parents

Preschool-Aged Children (ages 3-5)

- Preschoolers need between 11 and 13 hours of sleep. Most preschoolers stop taking naps between 3 and 5 years of age. Some preschoolers continue to awaken during the night. A preschooler who has not learned how to fall asleep on their own at bedtime will not be able to return to sleep without help from their parents.
- Sleep problems are common during the preschool years, including nighttime fears and nightmares. Nighttime fears and nightmares are a part of normal development. Sleepwalking and sleep terrors are also common during the preschool years and peak in this age group.

School-Aged Children (ages 5-12)

- School-aged children need between 10 and 11 hours of sleep per night. Not getting enough sleep is common in this age group, given increasing school obligations (e.g. homework), evening activities, and later bedtimes. Sleep problems are also common in school-aged children, including sleepwalking, sleep terrors, teeth grinding, nighttime fears, snoring, and noisy breathing.

Adolescents (ages 13-18)

- Adolescents are known for not getting enough sleep. The average amount of sleep that teenagers get is approximately 7 hours. However, they need between 9 and 9 ½ hours of sleep each night.

Teenagers do not get enough sleep for a number of reasons:

- **Shift in sleep schedule.** After puberty, there is a biological shift in an adolescent’s internal clock of about 2 hours, meaning that a teenager who used to fall asleep at 9:00 PM will now not be able to fall asleep until 11:00PM. It also means waking 2 hours later in the morning.
- **Early high school start times.** In most school districts, the move to high school is accompanied by an earlier school start time. Some high schools start as early as 7:00 AM, meaning that some teenagers have to get up as early as 5:00 AM to get ready for and travel to school.
- **Social and school obligations.** Homework, sports, after-school activities (often occurring during the evening), and socializing lead to late bedtimes.

Tips to Promote Sleep Health - Adapted from: Mindell JA & Owens JA (2003)

- **Sleep schedule.** Keeping your child’s bedtime and wake-up time consistent will help the child’s body learn when it’s time to fall asleep. There should not be more than an hour’s difference in bedtime and wake-up time between school nights and non-school nights.
- **Bedtime routine.** Your child should have a 20 to 30-minute bedtime routine that is the same every night. The routine should include calm activities, such as reading a book or talking about the day, with the last part occurring in the room where your child sleeps. Having your child in their bed alone when they are drowsy, but awake, teaches them that they can fall asleep on their own without you present.
- **Bedroom.** Your child’s bedroom should be comfortable, quiet, and dark. Many children have fears of the dark. A nightlight is fine, as a completely dark room can be scary for some children. Your child will sleep better in a room that is cool (less than 75° F). The sound of a quiet fan or a sound machine may help sooth your child to sleep. Also, avoid using your child’s bedroom for time out or other punishment. You want your child to think of the bedroom as a good place, not a bad one.
- **Snack.** Your child should not go to bed hungry. A light snack (such as milk and low-fat cheese) before bed is a good idea. Heavy meals within an hour or two of bedtime, however, may interfere with sleep.
- **Caffeine.** Your child should avoid caffeine for at least 6 to 8 hours before bedtime. Caffeine can be found in many types of soda, coffee, iced tea, and chocolate.
- **Evening activities.** The hour before bed should be a quiet time. Your child should not get involved in high-energy activities, such as rough play or playing outside, or stimulating activities, such as computer games.
- **Television.** Keep the television set out of your child’s bedroom. Children can easily develop the bad habit of “needing” the television to fall asleep. It is also much more difficult to control your child’s television viewing if the set is in the bedroom.
- **Naps.** Naps should be geared to your child’s age and developmental needs. However, very long naps or too many naps should be avoided, as too much daytime sleep can result in your child sleeping less at night.
- **Exercise.** Your child should spend time outside every day and get daily exercise, but if possible, limit strenuous exercise within 4 hours of bedtime or it may be difficult for your child to settle into sleep.

Books & Web Sites

What To Do When You Dread your Bed by Dawn Huebener, Ph.D.

The Sleep Fairy by Janie and Macy Peterson

Taking Charge of your Child’s Sleep: All in one Resource for Solving Sleep Problems in Kids and Teens by Judith Owens, M.D. and Jodi A. Mindell, Ph.D.

Local Resources

Daily Behavioral Health, 14538 Grapeland Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44111, 216-252-1399,
www.dailybh.com Offices in West Cleveland and Avon

This Guide Provided By:

