

Hand-out for Parents

HELPING KIDS GET ENOUGH SLEEP

REMEMBER WHEN your parents used to tell you to get to bed because you needed your sleep? Well, they were right. Research has shown that not getting enough sleep can have an impact on children's behaviour, emotional well-being and school performance. What's more, research shows that today's kids are getting less sleep than children from past generations. And certain aspects of modern life, such as heavy use of cellphones, computers and other electronic devices, are interfering with the amount of sleep children get. But there are some things you can do to encourage your children to get the sleep they need.

- Set regular bedtimes for your kids and consistent bedtime routines. This helps young children develop a sort of rhythm for sleep and waking.
- Try to get your children off the computer (and other screens) at least an hour before bedtime. Computers, televisions, tablets and cellphones (and the light they emit) stimulate the brain in ways that make it harder for kids to feel ready for sleep.
- Help your child wind down before bedtime. Do something relaxing together – read stories, listen to quiet music or do some belly breathing (deep, slow breathing that helps to reduce anxiety and stress).
- Encourage your child to get exercise earlier in the day. Research shows that children who are physically active during the day fall asleep faster and get more sleep than kids who spend a lot of time sitting.

Teens and Sleep: A big challenge

Do you have a teenager who seems driven to stay up late and has trouble getting up in the morning? It's normal. And it's not just a bad habit. Teenagers' internal clocks work differently, and that makes it hard for them to feel sleepy at the time when we think they should be going to bed. And yet, many teens are chronically short of sleep. That can affect their mood, school performance, and more.

What can you do about it? Frankly, this is a tough one for parents. Here are a few strategies that might help:



Sleep and screens are a bad combination.

- Have a weekday bedtime and a curfew on weekends. Of course, you can't *make* kids sleep, but having a time when they need to be in their rooms, preferably without a cellphone, computer, tablet or gaming console, may help them wind down for sleep. A set bedtime also gives them the message that you think sleep should be a priority.
- Don't make sleep a battleground. Basically, you can't win. But do talk to your teenagers about why sleep is important, and encourage them (without nagging) to get enough. Do some research together. Here's a [website](#) you can visit together to learn more about how sleep promotes learning and overall health.
- Let them sleep in on weekends. Some experts discourage sleeping in, saying it creates a sort of jet lag. Perhaps, but teenagers do need to catch up on their sleep somehow and for most, weekend mornings are the easiest time to do it. It's probably best to get them up before noon, though, to avoid insomnia troubles Sunday night.
- Have a "no cellphones in bed" policy. Studies show that a surprising number of teenagers send and receive text messages at times when they should be asleep. Some are even woken up by text messages from their friends. Make nighttime the time when everyone (including you) charges cellphones.