



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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October 21, 2009 – Sleep is Important for Children – and Parents

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Having trouble finding time for you and your child to get enough sleep? You're not alone. A poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation indicates that approximately half of all preschool and school-aged children fail to get the recommended amount of sleep each day and that nearly 40% of the parents of these children sleep less than the seven to eight hours per day recommended for adults. Most parents would agree that dealing with an overtired child can be especially frustrating when they themselves are short on sleep.

It is generally recommended that preschool children sleep 11 to 13 hours and school-aged children at least 10 hours each day. A variety of factors make it challenging for parents to assure that their children are meeting this daily sleep need. Extracurricular activities, homework, parent work schedules, and television are just a few examples of the activities competing with sleep for time in our daily schedules. In addition, approximately 25% of all children experience a reduction in sleep time due to a specific sleep problem. Bedtime resistance, difficulty falling asleep, and night wakings are common problems that often emerge during the preschool years, but can persist into later childhood. Unfortunately, when a child is having difficulty with sleep, it typically means that the sleep of one or more family members is also disrupted.

Whether due to social demands or a sleep problem, not getting enough sleep can impact a child's ability to function at his or her best during the day. Being able to identify children who are sleepy is an important first step in helping them get adequate sleep. Like adults, children who are overly tired may have trouble waking up in the morning and may fall asleep at unplanned times, such as while watching TV. However, unlike adults, who most often appear drowsy when tired, sleepy children can appear moody, irritable, hyperactive, non-compliant, and inattentive. Over time, insufficient sleep can lead to problems in academic, social, emotional, and behavioral functioning.

If you are one of many parents struggling to help your child get a good night of sleep, your pediatrician or another trained professional can help. Here are some general recommendations that may also help your child fall asleep, stay asleep, and get the best sleep possible:

- Keep a sleep schedule that does not differ by more than one hour on weekdays and weekends.
- Establish a calming 20 to 30 minute bedtime routine.
- Make sure that your child's bedroom is quiet, dark, and comfortable.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Get daily exercise.
- Avoid high energy activities, TV, computer, and video games for at least one hour prior to bedtime.

- Avoid naps that occur too close to bedtime.

And by the way, these recommendations work for parents too!

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