



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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October 28, 2009 – Sleep Important for Teens Too

Brian Crosby, Ph.D., is Postdoctoral Fellow in Psychology at Penn State. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Teens face an increasing number of demands on their time, including homework, jobs, and social obligations. Often this means that the time spent on other activities must be reduced to meet these demands. Unfortunately, teens seem to be following the lead of many adults in this country, sacrificing sleep in order to fulfill other obligations. Teens need between 9 and 9 ½ hours of sleep per night, but research shows that they only get an average of about 7 hours of per night!

Busy schedules, however, are not solely to blame for insufficient sleep in teenagers. During adolescence, a biological shift in sleep patterns occurs making it more natural for teens to both fall asleep and wake up later. As a result, teens frequently stay up late and sleep in on weekends, but then have to shift to an earlier schedule during the week to accommodate school schedules. Unfortunately, the body is not good at handling these fluctuations in sleep patterns – staying up late on weekend nights makes it difficult to fall asleep at an earlier time during the school week. Together, late bedtimes and early morning wake times mean that many teens do not get enough sleep, especially during the school week.

Regardless of the cause, research suggests that failure to get the required amount of sleep each day makes it difficult for teens to function at their best and increases the likelihood of their participation in risky and dangerous behaviors. Sleep deprivation in teens is associated with being moody and irritable, getting poor grades in school, difficulty with memory and attention, and falling asleep in class. Perhaps one of the most serious behaviors associated with sleepiness in teens may be drowsy driving. More than half of teens who drive acknowledged driving while drowsy in the past year and teens are among the highest risk groups for accidents related to drowsy driving.

Even if parents are aware of their teen's sleep deficit, they are often challenged to know how to help. An open dialogue about the importance of sleep is a great place to start. Parents can also help by modeling positive sleep habits for their teens. Here are a few basic recommendations to get started:

- Wake up and go to bed at about the same time on school nights and non-school nights. Make sure that adequate time for sleep is built into the daily schedule.
- Avoid oversleeping on weekends to "catch up" on sleep. This can lead to problems falling asleep at bedtime during the week.
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening.
- Don't use over-the-counter sleep aides without consulting your doctor.
- Avoid using TV's, computers, and cell phones prior to bedtime. These activities can make falling asleep more difficult.
- If you feel sleepy during the day, a 30 minute nap in the early afternoon can help. Very long naps and naps occurring too close to bedtime can make it difficult for you to fall asleep at night.

Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care*
Serving State College Area School District
Dawn Taylor, Community Mobilizer, 814-237-6191
dtaylor105@gmail.com
Web address: carecentreregion.org

Centre County *Communities That Care*
Serving the School Districts of Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and
Philipsburg-Osceola
Elizabeth Eckley, Community Mobilizer, 814-404-9511
centrecountyctc@yahoo.com
Web address: centrecountyctc.org