

Sleep Hygiene & Mental Illness

General Information:

Mental health can be affected by nutrition, physical activity, electronics, connection, play/fun and, you guessed it - sleep. Most of us know how important sleep is, but when you're concerned about your child's mental health - sleep is a critical piece to their mental health. It is one of the many pieces we have control over when it comes to living with mental illness.

Sleep is a very important part of your child's mental and physical health because it provides your child the opportunity for rest and recovery from the action of the day. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, studies have demonstrated that kids who regularly get an enough sleep have:

- improved attention
- improved behavior
- improved learning,
- improved memory
- improved overall mental and physical health.

Lack of sleep can lead to its own set of problems.

For example, a lack of sleep can cause irritability, forgetfulness, learning difficulties and low motivation. Over time, a lack of sleep can contribute to depression and anxiety.

How many hours of sleep do kids need?

Sleep time guidelines depend on a child's age. Every child is different. Overall, kids need less sleep as they get older. However, according to the Canadian Paediatric Society, here are some guidelines:

- Youth ages 6 - 13 years need around 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night;
- Teens aged 14 - 18 require around 8 to 10 hours per night.

What is "sleep routine"?

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In general, a sleep routine is taking a consistent approach to your child's sleep routine, both "going to sleep" time and "waking up" time, each day over a period of days.

What can I do to help my child with their sleep routine?

There are many things you can do to help your youth or teen get good quality sleep as often as possible:

1. It is incredibly important to have a nightly sleep routine, as this helps to make it predictable, and thus a priority that your child is getting enough sleep each night.
2. Set strong limits, such as the time lights are to be turned off.
3. Have a bedtime routine. For example: put pyjamas on, wash face, brush teeth, enter electronics-free bedroom with lights on low, read or journal for 10 minutes, turn light off and settle in for sleep.
4. Engage in relaxing activities in order to wind down, such as taking a bath, enjoying soft music, or even reading a book.
5. Make the sleep environment soothing. The room should be temperate and the lights dim. Using a soft light source such as a nightlight or dimmable string lights can be helpful.
6. Make sure your child is not using screen time from around two hours before bed, as the blue light from phone and computer screens can be quite stimulating.
7. Try to avoid naps as these could make it harder for your child to go to sleep at a regular time each night.
8. Keep a regular sleep schedule. Your child should try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. If they like to sleep later on the weekends, he should wake up within 2 hours of the weekday wake-up time. For example, if their wake-up time is at 7 AM during the week, then the weekend wake-up time should be no later than 9 AM.
9. Keep your child active during the day but avoid strenuous exercise before bedtime. Try not to schedule too many activities, especially at night.
10. Avoid caffeine, especially from the afternoon forward.
11. A snack before bed is fine but a big meal will keep the child awake as he or she is digesting the food.
12. Beds are for sleeping only. Try to have the child avoid eating or watching television in bed.

13. Help your child learn to sleep when sleepy, lest a “second wind” emerges.

How is sleep linked to and how can it affect mental illness/mental health?

Did you know:

A good night's sleep is critical to helping your child with problem solving, learning, and simply enjoying what life has in store for them. Sleep allows time for rest and recovery and, in fact, the brain is very busy at night storing memories and charging up for the next day. There are parts of your child's brain that are even more active during sleep than they are during the day.

Children who consistently get a good night's sleep:

- Have greater creativity
- Have better concentration
- Have better problem-solving abilities
- Are better able to make positive decisions
- Are better able to learn
- Have better memory
- Have more energy when awake

Sleep is critical to your child's mental health. Try to work out a solid sleep routine and sleep schedule and you'll be helping your child achieve a more positive state of mental health.