

# Helping Kids Get Enough Sleep: Tips to Share With Parents

Although sleep problems persist among many American children, parents can make a difference by setting boundaries around electronics use, enforcing rules and setting a good example. These are the latest findings from the National Sleep Foundation's Sleep in America® poll, an annual study that began in 1991. The 2014 poll took a deeper look into the sleep practices and beliefs of the modern family with school-aged children.

“For children, a good night’s sleep is essential to health, development and performance in school,” said Kristen L. Knutson, Ph.D., University of Chicago. “We found that when parents take action to protect their children’s sleep, their children sleep better.”



## Many children are not getting the sleep they need.

Many children get less sleep on school nights than they should, with some getting less sleep than their own parents think they need. The poll asked parents to estimate how much sleep their child typically gets on a school night. Parents' estimates of sleep time are 8.9 hours for children ages 6 to 10, 8.2 hours for 11 and 12 year olds, 7.7 hours for 13 and 14 year olds and 7.1 hours for teens ages 15 through 17.

The NSF recommends that children ages 6 to 10 get 10 to 11 hours of sleep per night, and that children in the other three age groups get 8.5 to 9.5 hours per night.

Parents were also asked how much sleep their child needs to be at his/her best, and 26 percent estimated this number to be at least one hour more than they say their child actually gets on school nights.

Parents do understand the importance of quality sleep, even if they do not always think their children get it; more than 9 in 10 parents think sleep is extremely or very important for their child's performance in school, health and well-being, and mood and behavior the next day.

## Turning electronics off while sleeping makes a difference.

Electronic devices are pervasive in modern American children's bedrooms. Parents report that nearly three out of four (72 percent) children ages 6 to 17 have at least one electronic device in the bedroom while they are sleeping.

Children who leave electronic devices on at night get less sleep on school nights than other children do, according to parents' estimates—a difference of up to nearly one hour on average per night. Parents also have a more negative view of the quality of their child's sleep if the child leaves electronics on while sleeping.

This holds true even with older children who are more likely to leave electronics on. Teens who leave devices on are estimated to get, on average, half an hour less sleep on school nights (7.2 hours per night) than those who never leave devices on (7.7 hours). Only 27 percent of parents whose teens leave devices on rate their teen's sleep as excellent, versus 53 percent of parents whose teens never leave electronics on.

### **Evening activities and homework can affect sleep quality.**

The modern family's busy schedule affects their sleep quality. More than one-third (34 percent) of parents report that scheduled evening activities pose challenges to their child getting a good night's sleep, and even more (41 percent) point to these activities as challenging their own good night's sleep. One in four (28 percent) parents report that in the last seven days, homework made it more difficult for their child to get a good night's sleep.

### **Enforcing rules helps children get more sleep.**

When parents set and enforce sleep rules, children sleep longer. Nearly all (92 percent) parents set one or more sleep-related rules for their children, and 62 percent of parents say they always enforce at least one of these rules. Children get more sleep when parents have rules about bedtime (children sleep an average of 1.1 hours more than children whose parents do not have such rules), how late the child can have caffeine drinks (0.7 hours more than those without rules) or how late the child can watch TV (0.6 hours more than those without rules).

### **Setting a good example encourages children to follow suit.**

Children whose parents have healthy sleep environments tend to have healthier sleep environments themselves. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of children whose parents have one or more "interactive" electronics (tablet or smartphone, laptop or desktop computer, and/or video game) in their bedroom also have at least one device in their own bedroom. Only 24 percent of children have a device in their bedroom if their parent does not.

### **Tips to share with parents:**

To improve your child's sleep, try these sleep tips:

1. Make sleep a healthy priority in your family's busy schedule.
2. Set appropriate and consistent bedtimes for yourself and your children, and stick to them.
3. Know how your child is using electronics in the bedroom. Create a plan for appropriate use at night

and set boundaries about use before and after bedtime.

4. Educate yourself and your child on how light from electronic device screens can interfere with sleep.
5. Talk to your child about the importance of sleep for health and well-being.
6. Talk to your child's teacher(s) about your child's alertness during the day. Let your child's teacher(s) know that you want to be made aware of any reports of your child falling asleep in school.
7. Remember that you are a role model to your child; set a good example.
8. Create a sleep-supportive bedroom and home environment, dimming the lights prior to bedtime and controlling the temperature (in most cases, temperatures above 75 degrees and below 54 degrees Fahrenheit will disrupt sleep).
9. Try to encourage activities such as reading or listening to music before bedtime instead of watching TV, playing video games or surfing the Web.
10. Make sure children's activities, including homework, can be completed without interfering with bedtimes.