

Sleep Hygiene Tips for Children & Pre-Teens

Age 5-12 Years

Things to DO:

- **Keep the same bedtime, and wake time, during the week as much as possible.**
- **Get outside at least 30 minutes a day, especially in the mornings.**
- **Bedtime should follow a predictable and calming routine.**
- **Keep the room where your child sleeps as calm, cool, and dark as possible.**
- **Encourage your child to only sleep in their bed, and avoid taking naps or sleeping in other places whenever possible.**
- **Try a comfort item at bedtime.** Consider trying a beloved doll, toy, or blanket when you cuddle or comfort your child, as this can help them associate the object with soothing.
- **If your child isn't feeling sleepy/drowsy at their planned bedtime, temporarily delay bedtime by 15-30 minutes until they feel sleepy.** This can help them fall asleep more quickly once in bed. The bedtime should then be gradually advanced earlier until the desired bed time is reached.
- **Keep night time checks on your child brief, and boring.** Checking in on your child at night is totally fine, *and* remember the purpose of these checks is to reassure the child you are present and they are okay.
- **Consider keeping a sleep diary with naps, sleep and wake times, and activities** to help your family find patterns & problem areas to address. This can be helpful when discussing sleep challenges with your care team, as well as to help your child's sleep habits stay consistent when they are babysat or supervised by another adult.

Things TO AVOID:

- **Going to bed hungry, thirsty, or overly full.**
- **Taking in any caffeine - found in soda, energy drinks, certain teas, and chocolate - or take any unnecessary medications that could affect sleep.**
- **Exercising or doing other very stimulating activities.** Remember to also avoid these activities if/when your child wakes up in the middle of the night.
- **Using screens (such as phones, tablets, computers, televisions).** Even with filters, the light from electronics and screens can disrupt our bodies' ability to naturally produce the hormone melatonin; which is what helps people feel drowsy or sleepy.
- **Only for older children (ages 8-12): If your child is still awake after 30 minutes, don't stay in bed.** Try keeping items in their room that allow your child to get up and do a relaxing activity outside of bed until they feel sleepy. This can become a good time to do things like color, write in a journal, listen to soothing music, or read by a soft light.

Adapted from the "Primary Care Principles for Child Mental Health" by Dr. Robert Hilt of Seattle Children's Hospital's Partnership Access Line (PAL), and "Why We Sleep" (2017) by Dr. Matthew Walker, neuroscientist & professor at UC Berkeley.

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