

The Importance of Sleep

Hello and welcome back to our fourth installment of our Student Support Services- Parenting Tips! We have looked at Extra Curricular activities and the family meal. We'll now talk about sleep and how it is an equally important part of development.

Sleep is something fundamental to our well-being and even survival. If you've ever been sleep-deprived, due to insomnia or a new baby, you know how hard this can be on the body. When the body doesn't get enough sleep, there are all sorts of research-based negative effects. These can include cravings toward sugar, lack of clarity in decision-making, poor reflex time, emotional instability, depression, anxiety, weight gain and the release of stress hormones (just to name a few). With children, it's no different. As Dr. Neufeld points out in his book, sleep is absolutely a key ingredient in order for the brain to "flourish" as he calls it. Dr. Leonard Sax has great concerns as well about lack of sleep. Parents sometimes wonder if their child suffers from ADHD. It's interesting to note that lack of rest mimics the symptoms of ADHD. Children who are sleep deprived will tend to be more hyperactive and can have difficulty concentrating or paying attention. Dr. Mel Levine, an American pediatrician who was extremely knowledgeable about learning disabilities, said as well that sleep is crucial. When children don't get enough sleep, they can become hyperactive because it is a desperate attempt to keep themselves awake and alert. If you ever have concerns about attention issues, ask yourself how many hours of sleep your child is getting most nights. There is some variation given by doctors but generally the guidelines are as follows:

Pre-school 2-5: 10-13 (including naps) hours per day

Children ages 6—12: 9-12 hours per day

Teenagers:-8-10 hours per day

Screen time is partly to blame for lack of sleep. When a person is exposed to a computer, iPhone or TV, their minds start to rev up rather than slow down. According to research, screen time imitates the process of the sun rising, which decreases our body's production of melatonin and encourages us to become alert. Have you felt tired but then logged onto the internet right before bed? Suddenly you find yourself reading an email or a webpage and before you know it, an hour has passed and you feel more awake! This is the same thing that happens to children. The cumulative effect of staying awake late or not getting into a deep sleep is wreaking havoc on the body. It is recommended that screen time of any sort be limited to a small amount per day and be avoided in the hour before bedtime. Use the time instead for a story, a bath or a quiet game.

Other things that can get in the way of a good night's sleep include being overscheduled with activity (having too much on one's plate that there is no time to decompress), lack of physical activity and too much sugar in the diet (which gives the initial burst of energy but leads to a "crashing" effect later on). In our society, we often hear expressions like, "I can sleep when

’m dead” or the feeling like one is wasting time by resting. However, this is one of the best things we can actually be doing for ourselves and certainly for our children so their brains may reach their maximum potential.