

Sleep Hygiene

Children and adolescents can have sleep disturbances including trouble falling asleep, nighttime awaking and nightmares. Sleep can be disturbed by mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and anxiety. A full restful night sleep is important so children can manage emotions, behaviors, and stress. Promoting good sleep practices, also referred to as sleep hygiene is important to healthy development of all children and adolescents, and especially important when they also have mental and behavioral health issues.

- Keep consistent bedtimes and wake times every day of the week. Late nights can cause fatigue that throws off a sleep schedule.
- Bedtime should follow a predictable sequence of events, such as bath time, brushing teeth and reading a story.
- Put children to bed drowsy, but still awake.
- Keep bedroom cool and quiet and comfortable.
- Physical exercise during the day often helps with sleep time later.
- Relaxation techniques such as performing deep slow abdominal breaths or imagining scenes like being on a beach can help children relax.
- A comforting object at bedtime is often helpful for child to feel safe and secure when their parent is not present.
- Avoid letting children spend non-sleep time in bed which can cause the brain to not associate the bed with sleep time.
- Avoid letting children fall asleep in non-bedroom places or with parents.
- Avoid high stimulation activities just before bed, such as watching television, playing videogames or rowdy play or exercise. If there is nighttime waking these same activities should be avoided.
- Avoid using electronic devices 1-2 hours before bedtime. Screen time can interfere with the body's natural signal to fall asleep.
- Avoid caffeine (soda, chocolate) in the afternoons and evenings. Caffeine, even in small amounts, can prevent falling asleep and lead to shallow sleep or frequent awakenings.
- Worry time should not be at bedtime. Children with this problem can try having a "worry time" scheduled earlier when they are encouraged to discuss their worries with a parent and then put them aside.
- If you need to check on your child at night, checks should be brief and boring. The purpose is to reassure your child you are present and that they are okay.

Resources:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP):

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Childrens-Sleep-Problems-034.aspx