

Bedtime Routines

by John Hoffman

Research shows that many of today's children get less sleep than they need. Child development expert Stuart Shanker says, "Don't underestimate the negative impact that insufficient sleep can have on children's behaviour and learning." Here are some ways to help your child get enough sleep.

Have a consistent bedtime. You don't need to be completely rigid, but keeping consistent bedtime and waking up times, especially on school days, helps children fall into a pattern where their bodies become physiologically accustomed to winding down for sleep at the same time each day.

Create calming bedtime routines. Parents can't "make" children go to sleep. However, a bedtime routine that includes a small snack, a relaxing bath, and some quiet one-on-one time with Mom or Dad reading stories or having quiet conversation helps them relax and get into a physiological and mental state that will help them to fall asleep.

Limit screen time. Although children love video games and other screen activities, the intense visual stimulation of video and TV screens actually stresses their visual systems and puts them into a state of physiological arousal that makes it harder to fall asleep. Try to turn off the TV or computer at least one hour before bedtime.

Have soothing sounds in background. Children who often have trouble falling asleep (yet seem tired in the morning) may settle down more easily with a neutral background noise, like a fan, an aquarium, or soft music. Black-out blinds may also help, especially in the spring. Some children find it comforting to sleep with a pet.

Get help if you need it. Being chronically short of sleep is not good for children. If you think your child has a problem in this area, don't hesitate to ask your doctor for a referral to someone who can help.