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Sleeping Sound: Understanding How Sleep Affects Children's Mental Well-being

MENTAL HEALTH SERIES



Why are children getting less sleep?

Children today are facing a sleep crisis. Many kids are not getting enough sleep these days. This happens because they have to wake up early for school, they spend too much time on screens, and they have more stressors than any generation before.

Did you know that 52 percent of kids ages 6 to 17 in the United States are not getting the recommended 9 hours of sleep each night, as doctors suggest? This sleep deprivation is not without consequences. Dr. Kansagra, a sleep expert, warns us that our young ones, especially teenagers, are still developing their frontal lobe and decision-making skills. When sleep deprivation becomes chronic, it impairs the frontal lobe, leading to reduced mental function, akin to the effects of alcohol consumption. Decision-making processes slow down, attention spans shorten, and memory function declines.

But the repercussions go beyond memory lapses. Dr. Lynelle Schneeberg, a Yale School of Medicine assistant professor and director of the behavioral sleep program at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, emphasizes that **sleep-deprived children are more likely to face behavioral problems, academic challenges, health issues, risky behaviors, and heightened anxiety and mood-related problems.**

As parents, it's crucial that we address this issue head-on. Our children's well-being is at stake, and it's time to take action to ensure they get the restorative sleep they need to thrive.

To ensure your child gets the sleep they need for their mental and physical well-being, establish a consistent bedtime routine that includes calming activities like reading or gentle music.

Create a sleep-conducive environment by keeping their bedroom cool, dark, and comfortable. Limit screen time before bedtime and encourage relaxation with soothing activities. **Consulting with a pediatrician or sleep specialist can provide tailored guidance and solutions for any persistent sleep issues.**



The blue light emitted by screens can keep us awake.

Keeping devices away from our kids' sleep time matters. Screens emit blue light that can disrupt their natural sleep patterns. These devices also stimulate their minds, making it harder for children to relax before bed. The anxiety and excitement from online activities can lead to sleep deprivation and inconsistent sleep schedules. **By creating a screen-free bedtime routine, we can help our kids establish healthier sleep habits and safeguard their overall well-being.** Inadequate sleep, combined with increased exposure to germs at school, heightens the risk of illness in young individuals. Sleep plays a critical role in strengthening the immune system, and insufficient rest can compromise their ability to fend off infections. Did you know poor sleep can contribute to stress, anxiety, and mood disorders? This further weakens the immune system and making them more vulnerable to illness. Sleep is vital to physical and mental well-being and lowering stress in youth.



Featured articles

Is social media affecting my child's ability to sleep?

The pairing of social media and sleep can pose significant challenges for kids due to various factors:

1. **Blue Light Exposure:** Interferes with natural melatonin needed for bedtime.
2. **Stimulation and Engagement:** Scrolling feeds can be highly engaging, often causing kids to lose track of time. This delays the onset of sleep.
3. **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** Social media and social comparison go hand in hand. This anxiety can keep kids checking their social media accounts late into the night, contributing to sleep deprivation.
4. **Emotional Impact:** Content including news, comments, and interactions can cause negative stress and provoke anxiety, making it difficult for them to relax and sleep peacefully.
5. **Interference with Bedtime Routine:** Spending time on social media can disrupt a consistent bedtime routine, which plays a crucial role in signaling to the body that it's time to wind down and sleep.
6. **Late-Night Interaction:** Engaging in social interactions late at night through messaging or comments can lead to irregular sleep patterns and reduced sleep duration.
7. **Reduced Sleep Quality:** Even if kids manage to fall asleep, the content they consume on social media can lead to restless sleep, nightmares, or disrupted sleep patterns.

To promote healthy sleep habits and overall well-being, it's advisable for parents to encourage their children to limit or avoid social media or device use before bedtime. Establishing a screen-free wind-down routine can significantly improve sleep quality and help kids get the rest they need to thrive.

"In our house we have made bedrooms NO PHONE ZONES for everyone in the family.



By keeping phones out of the bedroom, we empower our kids to disconnect from social pressures and the constant need for online validation, allowing them to focus on self-care and emotional well-being."

-ParentGuidance.org User

Understanding Teenage Sleep:

Changing Bedtimes: Teenagers tend to shift towards later bedtimes as they grow older, which is a common natural change.

Behavioral Factors: Their behaviors can also influence their bedtime habits.

School Impact: Late bedtimes and wake-up times can affect their school performance.

Preventive Steps: Simple techniques can help tackle these issues.

Expert Assistance: If problems persist, consider seeking help from a sleep specialist.

Communication with your teen about how sleep can affect their physical and mental well being can lead to your teen getting the necessary sleep they need at this developmental stage.



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