



“Sleep and School Success”

The start of the calendar year is often a time for New Year’s resolutions. For many overworked and over tired parents this can mean resolving to get more sleep. As adults, we can all relate to how being tired can affect work performance and crankiness at home. However, sleep deprivation has far greater impact on the developing brain of children. Research reveals that on average, North American kids today are getting at least an hour less sleep each night than their mind and body needs. Locally, 1 in 4 Grade Four students reported experiencing a good night’s sleep less than 2 times a week.



Sleep is essential for us all. When we sleep well, we are alert and refreshed and ready for the day ahead. Sleep affects how we look, feel and act each day. Sleep is the time in which the body recovers from daily activities, and processes what has been learned into long term memory. Sleep is also very important in regulating growth and appetite, and in maintaining a healthy immune system.

For our kids, getting a good night’s sleep is vital to ensure success at school. Medical studies show that getting enough sleep is important to clear thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and memory. What is perhaps surprising is how much sleep affects academic performance. An Israeli study of elementary students indicated that the loss of a single hour of sleep was the equivalent to the loss of two years of cognitive maturation and development. A Canadian study revealed that sleep deprived preschoolers perform significantly less well on tests of vocabulary and intelligence; US

studies show primary students performed less well on vocabulary and IQ tests; and that teens that received ‘A’s on their report cards averaged 36 minutes more sleep nightly, than ‘D’ students.

Short sleepers are more likely to appear inattentive, distracted, and impulsive than their well-rested classmates. If this were not enough, a British medical study revealed that sleep deprivation doubles the risk of obesity in children and adults. 26% of BC youth are overweight or obese.

One reason many children are losing sleep is that they are staying up late at night with their screens - watching TV, texting, tweeting, face booking, and/or playing video games. Late evening viewing and the presence of TV’s, computers, and cell phones in bedrooms, are considered ‘*risk factors*’ that contribute to kids not getting the rest that their minds and bodies need.

So what is ‘enough’ sleep? Sleep experts recommend that pre-school children sleep between 11- 13 hours a night; school aged children (ages 6-11) between 10-11 hours of sleep; and older students (ages 12-18) between 8-10 hours each night. So if your child’s report card shows room for improvement, it is probably well worth considering the question of sleep.

Here are some recommendations to help your child get a good night’s sleep:

- *Avoid stimulants, such as drinks with caffeine*
- *Follow a consistent bedtime routine*
- *Establish a relaxing setting at bedtime, with a quiet dark, cool bedroom.*
- *Avoid going to bed hungry*
- *Avoid screens an hour before bedtime.*
- *Do not permit your child to have a television, internet-connected computer, video games, or cell phone in his/her bedroom.*

For more information, tips and advice to help families manage media, and visit us at www.screensmart.ca