

## Encouraging Good Sleep Habits

If your family is anything like ours, summer is a time of slowing down and emptying agendas. Long days in the sun end with late evenings with family and friends, usually around a backyard fire. Camping, exploring, traveling and adventures have our whole family off schedule. Getting back to the routine of school is difficult on families, especially back to regular bedtimes!

One (or more) poor nights of sleep make it hard to focus, and have us feeling irritable and lethargic the next day. A good night's sleep for children helps them manage their behavior and emotions, which in turn helps them concentrate and learn at school.

**Sleep Hygiene**, according to [Kenneth Schuster](#), a Clinical Neuropsychologist at the Learning and Development Center in New York City, is a term that refers to establishing healthy bedtime habits and routines, making bedrooms good for sleeping and encouraging children to stay in their own bed for the night.

**Bedtime routine** at any age is the key. The biggest obstacle to getting children to sleep on time is often parental inconsistency. **Establish a routine and stick with it.** Predictability is both reassuring and soothing.

- **Younger children:** if a child knows they are going to take a bath, then cuddle with you for a bedtime story, then lights out, it gives them a chance to get sleepy on their own.
- **Older children:** remove ALL devices at least an hour before bedtime. They still need time to decompress from their day. When parenting teenagers, we typically stop "tucking them in", assuming they do not need or want us. However, I disagree with this assumption. As a mom of big kids, I have found that taking the time to go into each of their rooms for a hug and "I love you" (and to put their phone away in a central location!) is invaluable.

**Bedrooms** should be cool, dark, quiet as possible, with minimal distractions such as bright lights or exciting toys. Black out curtains and sound machines that mask background with white noise can help. Though it can be a struggle, **beds are for sleeping**, not homework, video games or watching TV (this is good advice for us parents too!).

A good night's sleep is the foundation for healthy brain development, mental wellness and cognitive growth. In addition, waking up refreshed will lessen the battles of getting children up early for school.

If your child continues to have serious trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, despite consistent sleep hygiene, consult with your family physician.

*This article was written by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to promote wellness and success in school. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 23 years and is a mother to 4 children; 2 in high school and 2 in university.*