

# Suggestions for Better Sleep

With busy extracurricular schedules and family routines, it can be difficult for your child to get the maximum recommended amount of sleep per night. The following list offers many suggestions to help your child get plenty of rest. This list is not meant to be implemented in its entirety. Instead, pick three to five changes that will work for you and your child.

## **ELECTRONICS AND STIMULANTS**

- Use an alarm clock to help your child wake up. If your child stares at the clock, waiting and hoping to fall asleep, turn the clock's face way from them.
- Do not feed your child anything with caffeine (e.g., chocolate, soda, tea, coffee, etc.) in the late afternoon and evening. Caffeine can cause nighttime awakenings and shallow sleep.
- Limit your child's screen time in the evenings, and power down all devices one hour before bedtime.
- Limit or avoid any stimulating activities right before bedtime. This includes physical exercise and late-night snacking.
- Keep televisions, computers, video game consoles, tablets, and cell phones out of your child's bedroom.
- If your child wakes up in the middle of the night, do not allow them to play with electronic devices with bright screens. The light from the devices disrupts normal sleep patterns and decreases the likelihood that your child will fall back asleep.

## **SLEEP ENVIRONMENT**

- Ensure that your child's bedroom environment is cool, quiet, cozy, and comfortable.
- Encourage your child to use their bed only for sleeping. Lying in bed while doing other activities (e.g., watching TV, using a tablet or computer, etc.) makes it difficult for children to associate the bed with bedtime and sleep.
- Put your child to sleep while they are drowsy, but still awake. Allowing children to fall asleep in places other than their beds teaches them to associate sleep with those places, rather than with their beds.
- Present your child with a security object like a stuffed animal, doll, toy, or soft blanket, and ask them to get this object when transitioning to bedtime. Security objects help children feel safe when a parent or primary caregiver isn't in the room.

## **NAPPING**

- For preschoolers and school-age children, incorporate naps into the daily routine. Daytime napping can increase attention span and energy levels in younger children. It can also help your child get the total amount of sleep they need per day if they aren't getting a full 10 to 13 hours of rest at night.
- Avoid putting your child down for a nap in the late afternoon or evening. Napping late in the day increases the likelihood that your child will have trouble falling and staying asleep for the night.

## **BEDTIME ROUTINE**

- Put your child to sleep and wake your child up at the same times every day, even on the weekends. Staying up too late and sleeping late on the weekends can throw off a child's sleep schedule for several days.
- Create a predictable series of events that lead up to your child's bedtime. This can include brushing teeth, taking a bath, putting on pajamas, listening to calming music, and reading a story from a book.
- Maintain a sleep diary. Track naps, bedtimes, wake times, and nighttime behaviors to find patterns that may be causing problems with your child during the day. This will help you both work on particular problems when sleep is not going well.

## **RELAXATION**

- If your child is having trouble relaxing before bed, guide them through deep breathing exercises and guided meditations (e.g., picture yourself relaxing on a beach).
- If your child is having trouble sleeping, allow them get out of bed and do something that isn't too stimulating, such as read a boring book (e.g., textbook). They can return to bed once they are sleepy again. If they are awake after 20 to 30 minutes after returning to bed, they can repeat the process and get out of bed for another 20 minutes before returning. This prevents the bed from being associated with sleeplessness.
- Use positive self-talk phrases regarding your child's ability to relax and fall asleep: "You can fall asleep." "You can relax." "You are safe."
- If your child is having disturbing thoughts that are keeping them from falling asleep, encourage them to write or draw in a bedtime journal. Give them space to express negative emotions in a healthy way.
- Keep bedtime checkups short and sweet. The main purpose of a bedtime checkup is to let your child know that you are there, and that they are safe. The briefer and less stimulating the bedtime checkup, the more likely your child is to relax and rest soundly for the night.

## **MOVEMENT**

- Start your child's day off right with exercise. Exercising earlier in the day can help children feel more energetic and awake. It also helps children focus their attention. It even helps with falling and staying asleep later in the evening.