



Sleep is essential at every age — and especially important for school-aged children. Healthy sleep is linked to stronger attention, memory, learning, behaviour, emotional regulation, mood, and overall quality of life. Parents/caregivers and teachers play an important role in supporting children’s sleep. Below are key recommendations for healthy sleep practices. Teachers can share these strategies with families, and parents/caregivers can support children in putting them into action. Well-rested children are happier, healthier, and better prepared for great days at home and at school.

Healthy Sleep Practice Recommendations for Children Ages 5-12 years



Age-appropriate Bedtimes and Wake Times with Consistency

Consistent bedtimes and wake times are foundational for healthy sleep. Children ages 5–12 years need 9–11 hours of sleep each night. Bedtime should be no later than 9:00 p.m. Bedtimes and wake times should remain consistent (even on weekends) with no more than a 30-minute difference between weekday and weekend schedules.



Schedules & Routines

Start by setting the wake time, then determine bedtime to ensure enough sleep. Schedules work best when embedded in a predictable routine. Bedtime routines should last 30–60 minutes and include a calming “wind-down” period with quieter activities and dimmer lighting. If the child is old enough, involve them in choosing parts of the routine. Consistency throughout the day also supports sleep, including regular timing of meals, homework, and extracurricular activities.



Location

A comfortable bed in a quiet, dark, cool, and uncluttered room supports good sleep. The bedroom (or at least the bed) should be used only for sleeping. It should feel calm and relaxing, not overly stimulating or distracting. In the morning, open the blinds and let in sunlight to signal the start of the day. Remember: calm and dim at night; bright and energetic in the morning.



No Electronics in the bedroom or before bed

Children should avoid electronic devices (e.g., phones, tablets, laptops, TVs) for at least one hour before bedtime, and devices should be stored outside the bedroom. Screens emit blue light, which suppresses melatonin, the brain hormone that helps us fall asleep. More light means less melatonin and more difficulty falling asleep. Electronic content can also be stimulating or exciting, making it harder to wind down.



Exercise and diet

Daily physical activity supports healthy sleep, but vigorous exercise should not occur close to bedtime. A healthy diet also promotes better sleep. Avoid caffeine in the evening (e.g., pop, chocolate). Children should not go to bed hungry, but they should also avoid large meals right before bedtime. A small, balanced snack that includes carbohydrate and protein (e.g., toast with peanut butter) is ideal.



Positivity

Bedtime and wake time should both be positive --- bedtime calm and wake time energetic. Parents/caregivers and teachers can model a positive attitude about sleep and its importance for health and well-being. Children sleep best when they feel safe and loved. Avoid frustrating tasks or upsetting conversations before bed. If concerns arise at bedtime, write them down and plan to discuss them during the day.



Independence when falling asleep

Learning to fall asleep independently is an important sleep skill for school-aged children. It is normal to briefly wake during the night. When children fall asleep on their own, they are more likely to return to sleep independently. If they rely on a parent/caregiver's presence to fall asleep, they may fully wake when they notice that person is gone. Independence includes staying in bed without calling out. If a child calls out, respond calmly, briefly, and consistently to support long-term sleep skills.



Needs met during the day

Ensure your child's emotional and physical needs are consistently met during the day. This includes connection, attention, affection, food, water, and rest. When children feel cared for and connected, they are more relaxed and ready for sleep. If they have not had enough connection during the day, they may seek it at bedtime through stalling or resistance. Intentional connection during the day can make evenings much smoother.



All of the above equals a Great sleep!

All of the above adds up to great sleep — both sufficient duration and good quality. Great sleep supports better attention, memory, learning, behaviour, emotional regulation, mood, and overall quality of life. Great sleep leads to great days — for children, parents/caregivers, and teachers alike.

Resources

Better Nights, Better Days

<https://betternightsbetterdays.ca/>

Canadian Sleep Society

<https://css-scs.ca>

Canadian Sleep Research Consortium

<https://www.researchsleep.ca/>

National Sleep Foundation

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

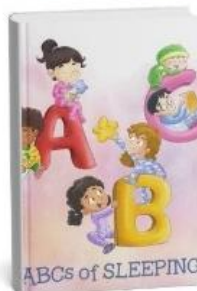
World Sleep Society

<https://worldsleepday.org/>

Sleep for Kids

<http://www.sleepforkids.org/>

COMING SOON...



Storybook



Sleep Health Tool

