

How to Develop Healthy Sleep Habits

Excerpt from Loving By Leading by Den A. Trumbull, MD

- **Get outside and play after school.** With all the electronic attractions (TV, computer, smart phone, video games) inside, you will tend to be idle in the evenings after school. Resist this and get outside. Go for a 30 minute walk/jog each day, play a sport, join the school band, cut or rake the yard, or help a neighbor with a project. Exercise will help you sleep better at nights
- **Limit the screen time on school day evenings.** For a healthier mind, read more and watch the “screens” less. TV watching, tablet or video gaming, social media, and Internet browsing can quickly consume your time in the evenings and lead to late nights. Limit *recreational* screen time (TV, tablet, phone, etc.) to ½ - 1 hour on school day nights. No video/tablet gaming on weekday evenings.
- **Have a reasonable bedtime on school day nights.** Adequate sleep is a key ingredient for a healthy mind and body. Too little sleep can lead to poor concentration at school, forgetfulness, depression, hyperactivity, and general loss of energy. Life can be very busy and school studies can be tough, but *plan* your evenings to get to bed on time.

- A reasonable target bedtime on school day nights:
 - K-6th grade: 7-8 pm
 - 7-9th grade: 8-9 pm
 - 10-12th grade: 9-10 pm

Homework or an extracurricular activities may occasionally push this time later, but on all other school day evenings be in bed at this time.

- Start your homework before supper, if possible.
- Avoid any napping after school. It will keep you up late at night if you do.
- Don't play games on video consoles or tablets on school day evenings.
- Avoid drinking caffeine-containing drinks with or after supper. Caffeine at lunch can even affect your ability to fall asleep in the evening.
- Get all screens (TV, tablet, smartphone) out of your bedroom; these are associated with trouble sleeping and poor school performance. Make the bedroom a “screen-free sanctuary.”
- Ideally, no screen viewing within 45 minutes of bedtime. The blue light emitted from screens stimulates your brain and can keep you up.
- Use a regular alarm clock (instead of a phone) for waking in the morning.
- Turn your cell phone off while studying. Remove the phone from the room at bedtime. It can go to the kitchen for overnight charging and parental reviewing.
- Dim the lights in your bedroom 30 minutes prior to bedtime. This helps prepare your mind for sleep and leads to melatonin (sleep hormone) secretion in your brain. Use black-out shades, if necessary, to make the bedroom dark.
- Read a book for the 10-15 minutes prior to bedtime to help you fall asleep.
- Your bedroom should be comfortable with good air circulation; maybe use a fan at night.
- Your bedroom should be completely dark and quiet during the night. Avoid using a sound machine, if possible. It may be useful, however, in noisy settings.