

Excerpted from Ginsburg KR. “Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings”

8. Sleep Well.

Sleep affects everything. Stressful situations, which could be easily managed when you're well-rested, can put young people (or you) over the edge when you're tired. Inadequate sleep can have a profoundly negative effect on health, ability to think, and mood. Adequate sleep is necessary to solidify newly gained memories or skills, so it isn't surprising that school performance declines with lack of sleep. Sleeplessness has also been associated with other serious consequences, such as an increased incidence of automobile crashes and even depression.

We know from our adult experiences, as well as from parenting our children, that sleep really matters, but getting children to bed on time and up at 6:00 am, can be nearly impossible. For teenagers, it's even more challenging. Sleep research data indicate that adolescents require 9 to 10 hours of sleep each night. But the majority of them aren't getting nearly that much, which is why excessive daytime sleepiness has become a widespread problem among teenagers.

What's Interfering with Sleep?

Most cases of sleepiness result from insufficient time in bed, often caused by external pressures (like studying) to go to bed later and wake up

earlier. Worrying in bed can also keep us from falling asleep and wake us throughout the night. Stimulants like caffeine can impair sleep quality and cause daytime sleepiness. Finally, the sleep-wake cycle changes dramatically during adolescence, making a teen's time clock quite different than an adult's.

Although medical conditions are not the most likely cause of sleepiness, it's important to consider them as a possible cause of a child's lack of sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institutes of Health) say that we should pay special attention to young people who have excessive sleepiness because they are most likely to have an underlying medical or mental health condition. According to their report, "Excessive Sleepiness in Adolescents and Young Adults: Causes, Consequences, and Treatment Strategies," we need to consider depression, obstructive sleep apnea, insomnia, narcolepsy, and other sleep disorders in adolescents with ongoing sleepiness. If your child often has trouble sleeping or is unusually sleepy during the day, talk with your pediatrician who can help determine whether your child may be suffering from chronic sleep deprivation or an underlying sleep disorder.

A health professional may ask your child the following questions, so you may wish to think about how they relate to your child:

- Do you have trouble falling asleep at bedtime?
 - Do you feel sleepy a lot during the day? In school? While driving?
 - Do you wake up a lot at night?
 - What time do you usually go to bed on school nights? Weekends?
 - How much sleep do you usually get?
 - Has anyone ever told you that you snore loudly at night?
 - Do you have repeated dreams that disturb you?

In addition, your child should be asked about mood and stress to consider the possibility of depression. The next thing to consider, and possibly the easiest to address, is the use of stimulants. It takes 6 to 8 hours for caffeine to get out of our systems. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, colas and other soft drinks, chocolate, and at very high levels in newer energy and power drinks. Research finds that teens who drink caffeine in the afternoon and evening have more difficulty sleeping and are more tired during the day. Although caffeine does keep us awake for a short time, it won't overcome excessive sleepiness and does not overcome a sleep debt. In other words, it works in the short term but really adds to the bigger problem of sleepiness. I am not prepared to make a global statement about the use of caffeine, only to state that we need to understand that it is a real drug and should be used wisely and sparingly.

Most of us can relate to another major cause of sleeplessness—using the bed to do some of our best and often our toughest thinking. Sometimes we're so overstretched and busy that there is no down time in our lives, no time for processing our thoughts and feelings, or even for planning for tomorrow. The first chance to really be alone with your thoughts is when your head hits the pillow. Although it can be a relief to finally have some alone time, when the bed becomes the place to deal with important issues, it becomes a friend, even a counselor.

No wonder it becomes difficult to fall asleep. And then we wake up in the middle of the night for another opportunity to think through our problems. We all deserve a space to work through our feelings and develop solutions; it just shouldn't be the place where we sleep.

It is not just worrying that prevents the bed from becoming the place our bodies naturally associate with sleep. Anything that creates too much stimulation keeps our minds revved up and prevents us from falling smoothly into sleep. If young people move from activity to activity, they sometimes lack time to wind down. Wonderful thoughts may fill their heads, but they're still spinning from the day's activities.

Any activity done in bed increases the possibility of sleep problems. When homework is done in bed, the bed can become associated with anxiety about grades and tests. And nighttime awakening may increase in frequency because teens wake up to get the work done. When kids sprawl in bed while texting or talking to friends, the bed can become associated with excitement

and social pressures. I explain to my patients that the brain doesn't turn off when we fall asleep. It's just dialed down, like when your computer goes into sleep mode, and it's easily revved up when subconscious concerns come close to the surface. When the bed is used for purposes other than sleep, the brain is more likely to do its low-level thinking when you're asleep. As sleep naturally cycles from deep to light sleep throughout the night, we wake up in light sleep when our brains suggest we can finish our “work” if only we wake up. (Remember, work can be emotional work, school work, or a progress report.) We are much more likely to wake at night if the bed is our workspace. I don't tell kids not to worry, not to communicate with their friends, or to skip homework. I just want them to learn to do all of those things somewhere other than in bed.

If you think that your teen has become a night owl, you may be right. Adolescents' biologic clocks actually shift during puberty. They naturally want to stay up later because, as puberty progresses, the brain's sleep timing system switches on later at night. This sleep timing system is controlled by melatonin, a naturally occurring chemical that regulates biologic rhythms; one of those is the circadian rhythm of wakefulness and sleep. Because high schools have generally not shifted away from early morning start times, most teenagers lack adequate sleep. Some school districts acknowledge this and are moving towards later start times for teens and earlier ones for younger children, but that is not yet a widespread practice.

Sleep 101

Before we put together a plan for adequate sleep, it's important to review some basics of sleep:

We fall asleep when we allow our minds to turn off. We stay asleep when we believe that the bed is just for sleeping. We have a natural circadian rhythm that regulates our patterns of wakefulness and sleep. We are naturally diurnal, meaning that we are designed to be awake during the day and asleep at night. Anything that interferes with allowing our bodies to stick to that rhythm may interfere with sleep.

As diurnal creatures, we tend to become awakened with light and sleepy in the dark. This is critical to understand because artificial light has impacted on this natural design, and we can partially restore it by using light and darkness appropriately.

As diurnal beings, we also awaken when our bodies become heated, as they do in the sunlight of day, and become tired as they cool down. It is important to recognize also that our bodies become heated with exercise and with bathing. It takes 5 to 6 hours after exercise and 1 hour after a bath or shower to cool down.

Digestion takes work. Large meals before bedtime can cause indigestion. A lot of liquid before bed can necessitate nighttime bathroom visits.

When we wake in the middle of the night, we sometimes worry about getting back to sleep. As our anxiety builds, the chance of getting

back to sleep lessens. It is better to get out of bed, sit in a chair, and return to bed when really drowsy.

Dos and Don'ts

If we combine everything we know about sleep patterns with what we know about actions that interfere with sleep, a list of dos and don'ts becomes apparent. Remember, the reason to help your child (and maybe even you) follow these rules is not to take away late night fun or become rigid; it is to help manage the stressors of daily life while remaining alert and healthy.

Dos	Don'ts
Drink soothing beverages like herbal teas or warm milk before bed	Consume caffeine 6 to 8 hours before bed
Keep the cell phone recharging dock in the kitchen or living room, and insist all electronic devices get recharged there over night	Have TVs, computers, or cell phones in the bedroom; if they're already in the bedroom, they must be turned off at bedtime
Have a place to release emotions and express feelings, not in bed	Worry in bed
Complete homework before bedtime and feel satisfied that it is done	Do homework in bed
Make a list of things that need to be	Plan tomorrow in bed

done before going to bed and feel secure that the day is strategically planned	
If you awaken at night and can't fall back asleep easily, get up, stay in a dark room, and return to bed when drowsy	Stay in bed worrying about getting to sleep
Maintain a regular (but not rigid) sleep pattern	Take long naps; they interfere with developing a steady sleep pattern
Take power naps, limited to 20 minutes and not remotely close to bedtime	Stay in bed very late on the weekend mornings; this also prevents a sleep pattern from developing
Eat healthy	Eat heavy meals or large drinks before bed
Exercise 5 to 6 hours before bedtime	Do a heavy workout before bed
Take a relaxing bath or shower an hour before bed	Go to bed overheated
Dim the lights an hour or so before bed; open the shades or turn on the lights in the morning	Stay in bright lights late at night
Create a dark, quiet, comfortable, sleep environment	

A Plan for Young People Who Are Struggling with Sleep

First, a recap: When I talk with young patients about the importance of sleep, I suggest that they make their bed a special, almost sacred place. It should only be used for sleeping. Bed should *not* be a place to eat, read, listen to music, play games, veg out, talk on the phone, watch television, or play videos. Kids who treat their beds as sacred will get in the habit of relaxing and falling asleep more easily.

A leisurely bath an hour or so before bed helps relax the body and prepare it for sleep. I urge young people, as they are falling asleep, to unwind from the day and put aside worrisome thoughts. It's easier to do this if they have followed one of the strategies for releasing emotions (more in the next chapter and the ninth point of this stress-reduction plan). They must release their emotions somewhere other than in bed—perhaps sitting at a table or in a comfortable chair. Their bed should be a special place, not a place to worry, just to sleep. If it becomes a place to worry, it will become their counselor. They will want to talk for at least 50 minutes and will wake up through the night for another appointment.

Then I help them to develop a pattern to teach their bodies to sleep. This lesson starts with determining a reasonable bedtime. My intention isn't to create a rigid bedtime or for them to feel that it's a punishment, rather that I want their bodies to develop a healthy sleep-wake pattern. They set a time that they think will allow them to complete their homework and still get at

least 8 hours of sleep. We then call this time Time Zero (T0) and work backward, like this:

T0 – 6 hours: Work out. Exercise will help them manage stress and get their brains ready to be productive for homework.

T0 – 5 hours: Do homework until it's finished. When homework is done relax, play, or hang out. This is well-deserved downtime.

T0 – 1 hour: Take a warm relaxing shower or bath in dim lights.

T0 – 30 minutes: Release emotions through prayer or written, artistic, or verbal expression. (See Stress Reduction Point 10.) Plan for tomorrow by keeping a list or creating a timeline. The point is that all this work should be DONE before bedtime. It should be completed in dim light and, if desired, while sipping a calming drink. A note of warning: For young people who are particularly stressed, this wind-down emotional work may bring up anxieties too close to bedtime. If this is the case, the time for expression can be moved earlier and this time can just be used for emotional vacations (see Stress Reduction Point 9), like listening to music, meditating, or reading a book.

Some young people still struggle to wind down even after following this routine. At Covenant House Pennsylvania, we work with young people who have endured very difficult lives. Many of them have a great deal of difficulty falling asleep and ask me for medication. Instead, I have them work with Jed Michael, our stress reduction specialist who has been trained in Eastern Medicine healing practices. As I have learned from him, a person needs to have the opportunity to slip away into sleep and can do this best

when they're distracted from their thinking. The old technique of counting sheep is designed to distract people from their thoughts. But that technique does not take full advantage of the relaxing tonic of controlled breathing. Jed teaches our patients the 4–8 breathing technique. First, he teaches them that full breaths are belly/balloon breaths. They learn to lie on their backs and place their hands on their bellies with their fingers loosely interlocking. Normal breathing does not distend the abdomen and therefore does not cause the hands to rise or fingers to separate. Deep cleansing breaths first fill the belly, then chest, then mouth, the breath expands the belly and the hands pull gently apart. Our patients are taught to take a full breath while counting to 4. Then they hold that breath for about twice as long, or an 8 count. Finally, they slowly exhale to the count of 8, or even longer, if that's comfortable. This meditative breathing relaxes the body after a few cycles, but just as importantly, it requires full concentration. The mind is too preoccupied on the cycle of breathing to also focus on worries. We have found that with dedicated practice, even young people with a long history of insomnia slip away into a peaceful sleep. In most cases, results are obtained the first night. In time, many return to tell us that with greater sleep at night, they can better manage the stresses of their daily lives.

Expect resistance

When I speak to families or audiences, I probably get more resistance on the topic of sleep than any other guidance I offer. Everyone knows that

sleep is important, but they just don't feel it is practical to get even close to the recommended amount of sleep. Adolescents worry they won't have time for homework or time with friends. They cherish sleeping into the afternoon on Sundays, so they especially reject sticking to the same number of sleep hours on weekends as weeknights. Parents worry most about homework; they just don't think there will be enough time for exercise, relaxation, and emotional releases as well. Many teens and parents think that life will become cloudy without that late afternoon jolt of caffeine.

I have not been hiding under a rock. I witness how many directions children are pulled in, and I also want them to succeed. I challenge them to endure a trial period where a healthy amount of exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep comprise their main medicine. I feel certain that their increased efficiency, their lighter mood, and their newfound ability to concentrate will more than make up for all that time they "wasted" taking care of themselves. This is a lesson I hope will last them for a lifetime. I end with one more reminder that when parents model taking care of themselves, kids follow.