

# Relaxing bedtime routine helps children to sleep soundly

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Unplug the TV, turn off the computer and force the kids to quit stalling and go to bed. Doing so can help parents and caregivers recover up to 200 hours of sleep a year lost to children's nighttime awakenings, according to a Penn State Cooperative Extension expert.

"American [children](#) sleep less than doctors recommend. In fact, two-thirds experience frequent sleep problems," said Laurie Weinreb-Welch, a children, youth and family extension educator based in Clinton County, Pennsylvania.

These sleep problems develop during infancy and result in one-quarter of infants, toddlers and preschoolers appearing sleepy or overtired during the day, according to the National Sleep Foundation. This number

increases to three out of 10 school-aged children having difficulty awakening in the morning.

"Sleep is very important to a child's health and growth," said Weinreb-Welch "When children get enough sleep, they are more likely to function better, be less moody and have fewer behavioral problems."

Developing a regular bedtime routine can help children fall asleep more easily and allow them to sleep through the night. A "calm-down" routine can include activities such as taking a bath and reading.

"Young children view bedtime as a time of separation," said Weinreb-Welch. "They pull out a number of stalling tactics, such as repeated requests for water and trips to the bathroom."

Caffeine consumption and televisions in bedrooms also detrimentally affect sleeping. "Children with TVs in their bedrooms go to bed about 20 minutes later each night. This amounts to two hours of lost sleep each week," said Weinreb-Welch.

This lost sleep tends not to be recovered on weekends, either. About one-quarter of pre-school and school-aged children actually sleep less on weekends than weekdays.

While each child is different, children require similar amounts of sleep. These guidelines present typical sleep requirements per day by age:

- Zero to two months old: 10.5-18 hours
- Two to 12 months old: 14-15 hours
- One to three years old: 12-14 hours
- Three to five years old: 12-13 hours
- Five to 12 years old: 10-11 hours

Getting a good night's rest can alleviate some sleep problems, such as talking during sleep, bedwetting or nightmares. And while children often grow out of such problems, parents should call a doctor if they have concerns.

If parents think their children have sleep problems, they should assess the situation using the five "BEARS" questions:

- Bedtime: Does my child have problems getting to sleep?
- Excessive daytime sleepiness: Is my child hard to wake up or sleepy during the day?
- Awakenings: Does my child awaken frequently overnight and have trouble getting back to sleep?
- Regularity and duration of sleep: How much sleep does my child get through the week compared to what he or she needs?
- Snoring: Does my child snore loudly or have breathing problems at night?

"Establishing a timely, regular bedtime routine that is positive and relaxing ensures children will get enough sleep," said Weinreb-Welch. "Subsequently, parents and caregivers can gain enough [sleep](#) for their own optimum performance. Children's [sleep problems](#) will be less problematic, students' health and performance will increase, and the family will be happier."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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