

Trouble sleeping associated with behavioral problems in children with autism

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New research from the University of Missouri has found associations between trouble sleeping and behavioral problems in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

"Past research has found that [children](#) with ASD often have trouble sleeping at night. Many children with ASD also struggle with regulating their behavior during the day," said Micah Mazurek, assistant professor of health psychology in the MU School of Health Professions and the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders and co-author of the study. "Research on children without ASD has found that lack of sleep can contribute to these behavioral problems. In this study, we were specifically interested in whether sleep is related to challenging behavior in children with ASD."

To study the connection between sleep and behavioral problems Mazurek and co-author Kristin Sohl surveyed parents of 81 children with ASD. They examined common sleep problems including trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep and other specific sleep issues. They then examined whether these problems were related to common behavioral problems in children with ASD, including aggression, irritability, inattention and hyperactivity.

Through the analysis, Mazurek and Sohl found that [sleep difficulties](#) are highly related to daytime behavioral problems. Children who weren't sleeping well had greater problems with aggression, irritability and paying attention during the day. They found that children who awakened frequently throughout the night had the most trouble regulating their behavior. The research on sleep and behavior in children with ASD is ongoing, and future research will examine what may be causing these difficulties and which treatments may work best. In the meantime, they encourage parents to talk to their doctors about their children's sleep.

"If parents are noticing that their children are having [behavioral problems](#), it may be helpful to make sure they are sleeping well at night," Mazurek recommended. "For all children with ASD, it is important that parents and professionals routinely screen for [sleep](#) problems. Addressing these issues will help children be at their best during the day."

The *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* published the study, "Sleep and Behavioral Problems in Children with Autism Spectrum."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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