



Quick Tips for Providers: Educating Families about Sleep Problems

Sleep problems are common, affecting approximately 30% of typically developing children and 80% of children with developmental or mental health concerns. The most common sleep problems in children include difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, and sleeping alone. Many kids are also not getting enough sleep for their age:

Sleep Recommendations by Age:						
Newborn (0-3 months)	Infant (4-11 months)	Toddler (1-2 years)	Preschool (3-5 years)	School Age (6-13 years)	Teenager (14-17 years)	Young Adult (18-25 years)
14-17 hours	12-15 hours	11-14 hours	10-13 hours	9-11 hours	8-10 hours	7-9 hours

For many children, sleep problems are temporary and go away without intervention. For some children, sleep problems persist over extended periods of time and can lead to other difficulties, including but not limited to:

- **Inattention**
- **Poor impulse control**
- **Emotional dysregulation**
- **Physical health problems** (e.g., obesity)
- **Accidental injury**
- **School absenteeism**
- **Increased risk-taking behavior**
- **Academic performance problems**

Youth with sleep problems often struggle in school, with peers, and at home. Early identification and treatment are important in preventing later problems in relationships, with work, at home, and with self-care tasks.

What to do if your child is experiencing sleep problems:

There are several treatments available to help address sleep problems:

- **Ensure good sleep hygiene:**
 - Have a consistent bedtime routine. This should be no longer than 20-30 minutes and involve calming activities
 - Avoid exercise or eating close to bedtime
 - Keep a consistent sleep schedule during weekdays and weekends. It is recommended that children have a consistent bedtime and wake time every day, this can be shifted by 1-2 hours on the weekends
 - Stop use of electronics (e.g., television, mobile phone, tablet) 30-60 minutes before bedtime, and remove electronics from the bedroom if needed
 - Avoid caffeine (e.g., soda, tea)
 - Limit or reduce daytime naps for children older than 5-years-old. Avoid daytime naps if the child is sleeping through the night. If the child must nap, try to keep naps under 1 hour and before 3:00pm



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What to do if your child is experiencing sleep problems, *continued*:

- **Therapy:** For youth who continue to have difficulty with sleep after sleep hygiene is improved, behavioral strategies may be needed to address sleep associations (e.g., falling asleep independently) and behavioral challenges around sleep (e.g., stalling, bedtime fears/worries)
 - **Common behavioral strategies include:**
 - Bedtime fading (e.g., starting with a later bedtime and slowly moving the bedtime earlier)
 - Extinction (e.g., slowly removing caregiver presence at bedtime so the child learns to fall sleep on their own, cry it out method)
 - Settings limits (e.g., set clear expectations and rules around sleep)
 - Differential attention (e.g., avoid giving attention to bedtime delaying behaviors)
 - Positive reinforcement (e.g., use of a reward system to reinforce completion of sleep-related routines/behaviors)
- **Educational Supports:** Many kids with sleep problems benefit from having in-school accommodations and services through a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to address sleep-related impacts (e.g., attention, school absenteeism, learning challenges)
- **Medication:** There are some medications that may help lessen sleep problems (e.g. melatonin, alpha agonists) but their use should generally be time-limited