

Tips and Trends

Back-to-School Countdown: *Time to Reset Your Child's Sleep Clock*



If you're like many parents, you relax the rules about bedtime during summer months. After all, those longer days of sunlight are meant to be enjoyed! But if you don't want your child dozing off during algebra, now is the time to start getting those bedtime rules back in place. Too little sleep can contribute to poor school performance, behavior problems, irritability and even weight gain in children.

Here are six ways* to help make sure your children get the sleep they need right from the first day of school.

- **Determine the best sleep and wake times for your children during the school year.** Children ages 5 to 12 generally require about 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night. Teens need at least nine hours. Base their bedtime on when they need to get up on school mornings, making sure to allow them adequate sleep.
- **Start adjusting their sleep schedule two to three weeks before school begins.** Roll back their bedtimes and wake times gradually. For example, if your child's summer bedtime is 10:30 p.m. but his school year bedtime is 9:00 p.m. (because he needs to get up at 7:00 a.m.), set his bedtime (and wake time) 15 minutes earlier every other night. After 12 nights, your child's new schedule of sleeping from 9:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. should be in place and he will be used to it by the time school begins.
- **Establish a routine that starts at least half an hour before bedtime.** Getting into the habit of doing certain things each night – taking a bath, tidying up, brushing their teeth, reading – can help your children relax and fall asleep easily. Stop screen time at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- **Maintain your children's sleep and wake schedule on the weekends, too.** Don't let them sleep in more than 30 minutes beyond their weekday wake time.
- **Keep your kids active during the day.** Regular exercise promotes good sleep.
- **Set a good example. Maintain a regular sleep schedule yourself as much as possible.** It sends your kids the message that sleep is important and makes you feel good, too.

*Sources include the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Sleep Foundation.