

SLEEP SUMMARY AND SOLUTIONS FOR PARENTS OF TEENS & TWEENS

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Sleep, nutrition & exercise are the 3 pillars of good health in adolescence. When these are optimal, teenagers are protected from multiple physical & mental health problems. Resilient & good quality sleep are important protectors against mood & learning problems, that typically amplify in the face of acute stress, and worsen through high school years.

Despite 70% of our teenagers being sleep deprived, this problem goes largely unrecognised, and therefore uncorrected. Parents, educators, & doctors all have important roles in creating good sleep health.

Most sleepy teens NEVER get to the doctor for medical treatment. Some are mislabelled as depressed or anxious, and are seen by psychologists, who often neglect to treat the underlying sleep problem. As a parent, don't think that because your teen is in the bedroom at night they are sleeping, but this is not always so! Many teen bedrooms are social hubs, rather than sleep zones. Suspect a sleep problem if you see chronic grumpiness, anxiety, low moods, or academic under performance. Check with teachers for evidence of classroom inattention, poor engagement, distractibility. Most importantly, look out for the 2 "red flags" for poor sleep. These are, big weekend sleepins, &/or great difficulty in waking up, and getting moving on school mornings. If you still not sure about whether sleep is a problem, have a look at SleepShack for further information

If you detect a sleep problem, move to fix it. Many parents feel totally disempowered to move forward, perhaps fearing conflict, or restricting their teens independence. Be proactive. Act in you teens best interest, rather than being their best friend. Teens are highly unlikely to improve their sleep spontaneously & almost all NEED your help

Below is a 7 step solution pathway for parents to follow when you recognise a tired teen in your house. Progress with these solutions slowly if needbe. If met with brick walls, ask your son or daughter to choose just one of the strategies, as a starting point. Remember that change is difficult, & often slow!

1. SIT DOWN AND HAVE A SLEEP CHAT

Express your concerns openly & ask your teen what they think. Many teen normalise chronic tiredness, as it is so common. Try and engender some insight, and hopefully motivation to improve sleep will follow. Try to figure out what particular benefit of good sleep could be a key motivator (eg better at sport, less stressed, better learning etc)

2. LIGHTS OUT AGREEMENT

Broker a reasonable school night bedtime, and stick to it. Help achieve this by helping organise the timing of evening activities. Teens, especially boys, are often

poor evening organisers, and this risks bedtime delays. Agree that bedtime is also lights out time

3. AVOID/REVERSE CONDITIONED AROUSAL

Use the bed only for sleep. Do not lie on the bed outside sleep times.

4. PRE BED ROUTINE

Also known as “winding down”. Have a relaxing, routine, 45 minute period in the lead up to lights out. No screens. No school work. Nothing exciting. Do the components at the same time, in the same order, each night. This slowly trains the brain that “sleep is coming soon”. Components such as a bath (or shower), relaxed reading, chilled music, a snack and drink, yoga, are all fine

5. OVERNIGHT SCREEN LIMITATION

Ideally all devices should be away from the bedroom at night & charging elsewhere. This is usually the least popular strategy with teens, and you are likely to get pushback! If still problematic, mention the possibility of enforcing screen limits by acquiring an electronic limiter (Family Zone or similar).

6. SLEEP INS

As much as possible, minimise big weekend sleep ins

7. OTHER DIGITAL DEVICE STRATEGIES

In the evenings school work should be completed before social screen activity starts. Multi-tasking doesn't work

Although the teen bedroom has become the hub for digital device use, on school evenings, devices should be used in a common area of the house, such as the living room.

Be a good digital role model.

As a family, have a digital Sabbath every so often, on a weekend day. This demonstrates that FOMO & FOSO can be overcome, and healthy family activities without screens can be fun!

WHAT THEN?

If you are not winning, at any stage, feel free to come and see me with your tired teen, for professional help. We can meet either face to face at one of my clinics. Bookings on 0423 523 840. Alternatively, we can “cyber meet” for online assessment & treatment. Sign up at SleepShack (sleepshack.com.au)

Whatever you do, do not do nothing. Left untreated, sleep deprivation just gets worse through adolescence, and may lead to significant mental health problems. Lastly, our treatment success is higher in younger adolescence, so coming to see me earlier makes me look good!

