



Tweens & Teens: Negotiating the Sleep Deficit

*"There was never a child so lovely
but his mother was glad to get him to sleep."
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

What happens when kids become tweens and teens? It can seem to parents that any effort to uphold routines, especially with regard to getting up, homework, and bedtime, invites a power struggle. Remember, however, that it does take two to engage in a power contest. When it appears that your child is challenging you to a battle, it's possible to avoid escalating the situation by, as Rudolf Dreikurs often said, "taking your sails out of their wind." Avoid getting angry, and keep them in control of the things that are, indeed, their responsibility.

Around middle-school age (sometimes earlier), young adolescents begin to individuate from their parents and often reject many family values, especially those involving homework, both when and if it gets done, and bedtime. In some ways adolescence is a return to toddlerhood, when - no disrespect intended - you can't make them eat, can't make them sleep, and can't make them poop - or, in the case of teens, do their homework.



The foundation you lay with your middle-school-age child can help in the long term.

- Begin talking with your child about the importance of sleep and the impact it can have on health and school performance.
- From the start, set firm limits on electronic distractions in the bedroom, including computers, television, and cell phones.
- Talk about how much sleep your child needs in order to feel good the next day. Read together articles such as this one from [KidsHealth](#).
- Help her notice how she feels when she's had enough rest. "Wow, you were able to get your homework done in record time and still have energy for a bike ride."
- Depending on the ages of your children, consider setting family limits: "After 10:00 pm, everyone is in their bedrooms."
- When you begin to notice resistance, consider a compromise: "Can we agree on 10:00 pm on weekdays, and on the weekends you're in charge of your schedule?"

- Remember, privileges (e.g., a later bedtime) come with responsibility. Agree to a later bedtime when your teen has demonstrated the ability get up and ready in the morning with the current bedtime.

The teenage brain is undergoing monumental changes both physically and chemically. During adolescence the circadian rhythm shifts forward, and many teens don't become sleepy until after 11:00 pm, according to most experts. PEP Parent Educator Wendie Lubic advises parents to avoid battling with teens over sleep and instead to



hand over the responsibility, trusting that they will learn from their mistakes. "If they don't have the opportunity to experiment with sleep deficits now," she says, "they will when they get to college, and at that point you'll be paying for it, literally." Though arguably the most challenging solution for parents, the best approach is to let it go. If sleep is already an issue, begin by having an honest conversation with your teen:

- Share your concerns regarding sleep deprivation and its impact on everything from athletics to academics, including emotional and psychological wellbeing.
- Maintain limits on electronics in the bedroom.
- Talk about your own needs for sleep and your expectations. "I really need to get to bed before 11:00 pm in order to get enough rest. I'm not willing to be awakened by lights and noise in the middle of the night."
- Do not expect your teen to get to school on time. Don't rescue. If he misses the bus, he'll need to walk or find alternative transportation. Be sure to make this policy known in advance.
- Regardless of when he goes to bed, maintain the usual family routine. There's no need to be quiet during normal waking hours.
- Show self-respect by leaving (in a friendly manner) a room occupied by an irritable, sleep-deprived teen. Part of taking responsibility for sleep habits is learning that lack of sleep can make one an unpleasant companion.
- As a parent, take comfort in the fact that you're in good company. Most teens need at least 9 hours of sleep per night, and 90 percent of them get less than that.

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