

## Family Engagement (Virtual), Seaside Elementary, February 2021

Hello everyone, this is Mr. Homer, your principal at Seaside Elementary School. Part of our responsibility as a Title I school is to provide family engagement activities. Family engagement activities are best implemented in group settings, in-person, focused on an educational theme. The educational theme should promote school, parent, and student engagement to communicate and learn together so that we can help students be more successful in school. Unfortunately due to the pandemic, we cannot come together in an in-person group setting.

Second best, I will provide you with some information that you may find interesting and if your child is experiencing the problem some ways to help. Some strategies are applicable to both children and adults. The subject is promoting sleep strategies.

This information that I am sharing with you is available through [SleepFoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org) containing licensed content from the National Sleep Foundation. [SleepFoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org) features a medical board, expanded sleep science coverage, data-driven content, consumer reports, and intensive reviews of different sleep and wellness products. The site publishes authoritative, timely research about topics related to sleep and health.

It's well known that proper sleep is essential to a child's development and helps them to be more successful in school. But for the [15–25 percent](#) of kids and teens who struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep, getting adequate rest can feel daunting.

Helpless parents may begin to dread bedtime, unsure how to help their child fall asleep and sleep soundly. Sleeping pills, commonly turned to for [adult insomnia](#), are discouraged in children. Pharmaceutical sleep aids can have significant risk of side effects in children, and therefore should only be used under the careful guidance of a doctor. Some literature states that vitamins and supplements can be helpful to foster better sleep in children. However, vitamins and supplements may be marketed for children, but the Food and Drug Administration does not monitor them the same way they do drugs, so it is important to get a doctor's recommendation before trying them.

Fortunately, specific behavioral changes and adjustments to the sleep environment will help most children with insomnia. [SleepFoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org) has compiled the top tips that are proven to help kids sleep.

There are many strategies, but you do not need to implement them all at once. It is better to focus on trying a few small changes, giving them time to work, and then adjusting your approach based on how your child responds.

Keep in mind that every child's sleep needs will vary based on their age, genetics, and cultural differences. Therefore, not all approaches will work equally well for all children, and there can be an element of trial and error. However, your patience will be rewarded in time as your child learns to fall asleep quickly on their own and keep sleeping soundly through the night. As I stated earlier, some of these recommendations can help adults too!

Sleep hygiene is a collection of habits and behaviors that promote good sleep. Sleep hygiene is vital for children. Many sleep struggles are caused or made worse by poor sleep hygiene. When practicing sleep hygiene, remember that consistency is key. Sleep strategies take time and repetition to be effective. Here are some tips to promote sleep hygiene;

- Create a Routine: Humans are creatures of habit. A [consistent bedtime routine](#)<sup>2</sup> lets your child's body and mind know that it's time to settle down and prepare for sleep. The actual routine can be specific to your child, but it should last around 20 minutes and consist of three to four quiet, soothing activities such as putting on PJs, brushing teeth, a warm bath, and reading. Bedtime routines provide children with a sense of familiarity and comfort, which acts in direct opposition to the uncertainty of insomnia.
- Set a Bedtime: A sleep schedule works with your child's natural biological clock to promote dozing off with regularity. Bedtimes are most useful when they are consistent, so try to keep the same bedtime on weekends as on school nights. Altering bedtimes during the weekend will make it more difficult for kids to maintain their normal weekday schedules.
- Implement a Screen Curfew: Because screen exposure is so prevalent in today's society, it makes this rule hard to implement, but it's well worth it. Mobile devices, TVs, and tablets emit a type of [blue light](#) that suppresses melatonin, a hormone that promotes sleep. Children may be [particularly vulnerable](#)<sup>3</sup> to the effects of light from screens. Screen time also stimulates the brain, making it harder to wind down for sleep. Electronic devices should be kept out of the bedroom and ideally not used within one hour of bedtime.
- Get Exercise: Physical activity is proven to help people of all ages [fall asleep faster and stay asleep](#)<sup>5</sup>. Most children need at least [one hour](#)<sup>6</sup> of exercise per day. Just make sure to avoid vigorous activity within two hours of bedtime. Otherwise, your child may feel wound-up and find it harder to fall asleep.
- Avoid Scary or Violent Content: Feeling scared or worried is a common reason kids cannot sleep. So it isn't a wonder that scary or violent movies, TV, video games, and even books in the evening are [linked to sleep disturbances](#)<sup>7</sup> in children. If your child likes the spooky stuff, save it for the daytime.
- Withhold Caffeine: This is a common sense strategy. Caffeine is a stimulant that can both make it harder to fall asleep and reduce the quality of sleep. In addition to the usual suspects like soda, coffee, and energy drinks, watch out for more discreet sources like tea, decaf coffee (which still has trace amounts of caffeine) and chocolate. Even small amounts of caffeine can have a [big impact](#)<sup>8</sup> in a little body. Don't let your child consume caffeine [within six hours of bedtime](#)<sup>9</sup>, or preferably, avoid it all together.
- Don't Sleep With a Pet: While it's tempting for children to snuggle their pet dog in bed, a pet's movements and noises during the night can awaken them from a peaceful slumber. Try having your furry family member sleep outside of your child's bedroom for a few nights to see if that helps. To make the transition easier, include saying goodnight to pets in the bedtime routine.

## Making a Sleepy Bedroom

Optimizing your child's bedroom is an integral part of inducing quick and seamless sleep. People with insomnia are more likely to be [distracted by an uncomfortable bedroom](#)<sup>10</sup>, which makes sleep even harder. The following tips can help you create the perfect sleep setup for your child:

- Room Temperature: The body and brain both [cool down](#)<sup>11</sup> in preparation for sleep, and this can be disrupted by a stuffy bedroom. To avoid this, try to keep the thermostat around [65 degrees](#).

- Noise: Research suggests that even mild sound disturbances can [affect the quality of slumber<sup>12</sup>](#), even if the sleeper never awakens. Consider noise-blocking curtains to cut down on street noise. You can also use a fan or white noise machine to drown out unpredictable or distracting sounds.
- Light Level: Start dimming indoor lights as bedtime approaches, and keep your child's bedroom as dark as possible. This [promotes healthy levels of melatonin<sup>13</sup>](#) and [supports your child's natural biological clock<sup>14</sup>](#). If your child is afraid of the dark, a small nightlight is okay.
- Soothing smells: Calming scents like [lavender<sup>15</sup>](#) can have mild sedative effects. You might try using essential oils, a room diffuser, or dried potpourri sachet to provide a soothing, sleep-inducing smell.

## Overcoming Bedtime Worry

Unfortunately, childhood anxiety is [steadily rising<sup>16</sup>](#). Stress is [known to disrupt sleep<sup>17</sup>](#) in all ages, so anything that can reduce worrying before bed is helpful. Help your child learn to manage their concerns with these tactics:

- Write In a Journal: Encourage your child to get their anxious thoughts out of their head and onto paper. It can also help for them to write about the good things that happened in the day. Focusing on the positive will help children feel more secure.
- Mindfulness Exercises: Mindfulness exercises like meditation are proven to [calm the nervous system and decrease stress hormones<sup>18</sup>](#). There are many kid-friendly meditations that parents and children can do together. These often consist of simple breathing techniques, body awareness, or guided imagery. Look to books, tapes, and even smartphone apps for ideas. Yes, prayer is a form of meditation!
- Create a Worry Time: It is okay to discuss worries, just not at bedtime. Set aside a specific time during the day for your children to discuss their concerns and how to cope with them. This can free children of the need to dwell on worries before bed.

## The Art of The Room Check

It's normal for even the best little sleepers to awaken from slumber and ask for a parent. When your child cries out for you, it is okay to tend to them. However, you should do so with intention. This is not the time to give in to demands, as doing so can increase stimulation and make it harder to fall asleep. Fulfilling your child's every request can also reinforce an unhelpful pattern of relying on parental assistance for sleep.

Instead, keep the checks short and simple. The point is to provide your child with reassurance that they are safe and cared for, while still fostering their ability to self-soothe and sleep on their own. Some parents may even wait a few seconds before answering a call so that their child has the opportunity to fall back asleep on their own.

If you have any doubt over whether your child's nighttime checks are appropriate, consult your child's doctor for guidance.

## When to See The Doctor

If your child continues to have trouble sleeping despite your best efforts, it may be time to check in with their pediatrician. Although uncommon, there can be more serious causes of childhood insomnia, such as [childhood sleep apnea](#) or [restless leg syndrome](#).

Any of these reasons are cause to involve a doctor:

- Significant daytime sleepiness
- Frequent or severe snoring or other abnormal breathing during sleep
- Suspected psychological or developmental condition
- Considering medications or supplements to aid in sleep

For a couple of weeks before the doctor appointment, it can help to keep a sleep diary. This is a nightly recording of your child's bed time, nap times, sleep length, and activities. A sleep diary helps to identify patterns and possible problems to address.

Well, I hope you have found this information helpful. This information will be posted on our school website and Facebook page along with additional information including several links so that you can further investigate the topic. As always, I wish you and your children continued academic, social, emotional, and behavioral success!