

The Wildcat Word

A Newsletter from the Guidance Department of Nottingham West Elementary School

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Gloria Eno, M.Ed., Guidance Counselor 595-1570 X1418

Meg Williams, M.Ed., Guidance Counselor 595-1570 X1419



Who Needs Sleep?

Is your child getting enough sleep? Studies by the National Sleep Foundation show that most American kids are not getting enough. Kids up to the fifth grade get less sleep on average than experts recommend for learning and school performance.



Sleep is closely linked to learning and memory. Poor mood, depression and even obesity are also tied to lack of adequate sleep. Kids who don't get enough sleep often have behavior problems. When they are overtired, kids unconsciously look for things to stimulate them and keep them alert, and sometimes will seem very "hyper" at the end of the day. Another sign that your child is not getting enough sleep is when he/she sleeps in much later on weekends.

Why do so many children come to school with a sleep "deficit"? Caffeine consumption (which comes mostly from caffeinated soda) and a television in the bedroom are the two factors that interfere the most with sleep. Studies on sleep find that children with a TV in the bedroom go to sleep almost 20 minutes later and sleep less than those without one.

In addition, parents don't always realize that their kids aren't getting the right amount of sleep. In a busy household with homework and extracurricular activities competing for time, regular bedtimes sometimes get pushed aside. The table below shows recommended amounts of sleep for kids of different ages.

Age	Recommended Hours
Infants	14-15 hours
Toddlers	12-14 hours
Preschoolers	11-13 hours
School Age	10-11 hours

Routines and regular bedtimes significantly increase the chance that your children are getting enough sleep to be at their best in school. Creating a quiet and comfortable bedroom, setting appropriate bedtime and wake times, and establishing a soothing routine at the end of the day can lead to better sleep for your kids. Keeping televisions and computers out of the bedroom will encourage your child to prepare for sleep.

To adjust your child to an earlier bedtime, try moving bedtime and waking time back by 15 minutes each day. Total sleep time is more important than the actual “bedtime”, so you can be more flexible about bedtimes on vacations and weekends.

If problems getting to sleep or sleeping through the night interfere with your child’s sleep, contact your pediatrician or your child’s guidance counselor for help.

Make Family Meals a Priority

Family meals are strongly related to the development of children's emotional health, as well as having nutritional advantages. Eating together gives parents a chance to model good food choices and manners. It encourages communication and fosters family traditions, and creates a sense of security and stability for children. But according to recent surveys, less than half of the families in the United States actually sit down to eat a meal together on a regular basis. Here are some tips from for making family mealtime work:

- Involve your children in planning, preparing and serving meals.
- Keep mealtime conversation positive. Save discussions about problems for another time.
- As much as possible, serve all family members the same food at the same time. Sit down together in one place.
- Turn off the TV. Try playing soft music or lighting candles to set a special mood. Even a takeout pizza is special by candlelight.
- If you are too busy to have family meals, you may just be too busy! Try to adjust your schedule to make eating together as a family one of the most important parts of your day.

