



Top Tips for Parents and Educators Developing Healthy Sleep Patterns

At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators DEVELOPING HEALTHY SLEEP PATTERNS

Quality sleep is paramount for wellbeing as it impacts our cognitive function, emotional balance and overall health. A World Health Organisation study highlighted that 44% of young people reported difficulty sleeping – potentially affecting their mood, concentration and immune system. Our guide offers expert tips for helping children to sleep more healthily.

- MINDFUL TECH USE**
Encourage a balanced approach to screen time. While phones, laptops, tablets and so on can serve as a helpful means of stress relief, it's advisable to minimise their use right before bed. These devices can keep the mind racing long after they're switched off, impacting how easily and how well a person can sleep.
- EFFECTIVE SLEEP PRACTICES**
Offer practical advice on reinforcing certain habits that have a positive influence on sleeping patterns. Children could start keeping a diary which they add to each evening, for example – or they could use up excess energy by exercising during the day.
- HYDRATION HABITS**
Underline the importance of drinking plenty of water throughout the day, while limiting drinks close to bedtime to prevent disruptions during the night. It's not harder to switch off if you keep needing to get out of bed for the toilet. Avoiding caffeinated drinks later in the day also allows the body and brain to slow down naturally, without any chemicals being them back up.
- CONSISTENT BEDTIME SCHEDULE**
Assist children in developing consistent bedtime routines that tell the body it's time to wind down, promoting a more relaxed state. Establish specific activities for young ones right before going to bed – such as brushing their teeth – to set up an association between that action and falling asleep.
- OPTIMAL SLEEP ENVIRONMENT**
Ensure that the bedroom is comfortable, dark and free from distractions, fostering an ideal space for quality rest. The room's temperature should also be suitable for sleeping – that is, not too hot and not too cold – while rooms should be kept as tidy and free of clutter as possible.
- RELAXING EVENING ACTIVITIES**
Recommend activities that have a calming effect on the mind – such as reading or gentle stretching – in the lead up to bedtime, to prepare the mind for a peaceful night's sleep. Doing something quiet, relaxing and low intensity signals to the brain that it's time to rest and makes falling asleep much easier.
- PRIORITISING ADEQUATE SLEEP**
Emphasise the crucial role of sleep in maintaining physical and emotional wellbeing. It's especially important to sustain a healthy sleep pattern during challenging and intensive periods in our lives, during the worst season for children and young people, for instance.
- NUTRITIONAL BALANCE**
Highlight the significance of a healthy, balanced diet – and its role in establishing a more consistent sleep pattern. Try to lean towards preparing meals with plenty of fruit and vegetables, served in reasonable portion sizes: not only is this a bit healthier, but it also reduces the chances of feeling too full to be comfortable in bed.
- PARENTAL SUPPORT**
Parents and carers, of course, are uniquely placed to support their children in establishing and maintaining healthy sleeping habits. Parents can review their own sleep habits (incorporating anything from this list that they don't do already) to model a balanced bedtime routine and reinforce the importance of self-care.
- MILITARY SLEEP METHOD**
Look up 'the military sleep method': it's a technique for falling asleep quickly, which incorporates deep breathing exercises. You could encourage children to try it or even use it yourself. While it can take a good deal of practice to perfect, eventually it will start to feel natural – and the results are often extremely impressive!

Meet Our Expert
Minds Ahead design and deliver the UK's only specialist postgraduate mental health qualifications. Winner of the Social Enterprise UK 'One to Watch' award, the charity provides training and support to education organisations and local authorities. This guide has been written by Adam Gillett – a learning and development specialist who is also Associate Vice-Principal for Personal Development at a large secondary school.

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Dreaming of a decent night's sleep? ☹️ Many of us *are* – and it's a particularly pervasive problem for young people. Concerningly, research has suggested that around 70% of teens get less than the recommended 8–10 hours' sleep per night. The effects of poor-quality sleep on a developing mind, of course, can be harmful over a prolonged period.

Although a significant portion of under-18s struggle for shut eye, there is still plenty we can do to support them in getting the beneficial rest they need during those formative years. Compiled in conjunction with our friends at award-winning mental health charity Minds Ahead, this week's #WakeUpWednesday guide has tips on helping children to develop healthy sleeping habits zzz

Please [click here](#) to download the guide.