



## USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP

### The Gift of Sleep

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As I talked with a group of teachers recently, each of us agreed that the kids we see are so tired they are falling asleep in class, on the bus, and are too sleepy to have fun or to be focused.

**What is the matter with us? Why are babies, toddlers, school age kids and even adults too sleepy to concentrate? They tend to be cranky, frustrated with their work and each other, and maybe mirroring the behaviors of their overtired parents.**

**We know that neither kids nor adults can learn or operate effectively if their brains are not alert and fully awake. It certainly follows that kids will develop more slowly if they are constantly tired. Teens and adults cannot learn and achieve at optimum levels in school or on the job and no one is as safe, because their reflexes are impaired and they are less attentive. So what can we do?**

**Renew your resolve to be consistent with your family's sleep.**

**Create a calming routine for yourself and for your children.**

For babies a bath, 5 minutes of quiet rocking or singing, and leave the room *cool and quiet* so they fall asleep without you. Infant expert Berry Brazelton says we need to remember to let babies learn their own quiet tricks for falling asleep. Then they fall *back* to sleep on their own. I remember Noreen, who rocked her daughter until she fell asleep every night. A huge mistake!!

For kids 2-7 keep the routine of bath, tooth brushing, reading together for about 10-15 minutes, then lights out and leave the room. Keep

bedtime routines short. Routines longer than 45 minutes wear *parents* out too much. One creative Mom I know had a special Grandmother doll that helped with all the tasks of separating from parents – at the preschool, when mommy went out at night, and at bedtime. Grandma doll was always there if needed, so mommy could leave.

For kids 7-teens the bath, tooth brushing, reading together, may be followed by reading on their own, but with a consistent bed time and routine.

Teens and adults need the same things, not too much busyness or stimulation at the end of the day, NO vigorous activity for two hours before sleep. Winding down routines can include the same ingredients - short shower or bath, quiet talk or reading before bed, and a consistent time for lights out! Move up everybody's bedtime to fit the current health guidelines for sleep – teens need 9-10 hours, adults 7-8 hours. Kids will follow if parents model healthy sleep habits.

**Consistency matters – Don't shift bedtimes and wake ups. Set firm boundaries.**

**Distractions matter– Bed routine allows no cell phones, video games, TVs or computers!**

**Attitude matters – Don't get mad, just be firm and set strong rules, with a smile. You'll be consistent if you reinforce the correct bedtime routine 25 nights in a row. Sleep tight!**

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