



"Massive Minds, Huge Hearts, Guided by God"

Sleep and Screen Use

The age of technology has brought with it many screens to entertain and educate us. All of these screens have a big impact on children's sleep, including TV screens, gaming and computer screens, and mobile devices such as tablets and phones.

Understanding

To understand how screen use can affect sleep we really need to understand what good sleep really is, and what it should be.

Good sleep means:

- The right amount of sleep.
- Good quality and restful sleep.
- Sleep at the right time of the day, so mainly at night time.
- And it means sleep that has fairly regular bedtimes and wake times, across the week and the weekend, and screen use can affect all of those things.

Screen Use

What do we mean by screen use? We mean tablets, mobile phones, computer screens, television screens and video games. All of those screens can affect our sleep in 3 different ways.

1. The first is using a screen at bedtime or before sleep time actually displaces sleep time. When you are using a screen you are not sleeping.

2. The second reason that screen use at night time is problematic for our sleep is because it disrupts our sleep physiology. Our sleep hormone Melatonin rises when it's dark and it triggers a whole range of reactions in our body to get us ready for sleep. And the trigger for Melatonin's rise is through our eyes. The eyes send a message to our brain, Melatonin secretes, we get sleepy and we go to sleep. But Melatonin needs darkness for this to happen.

So if our eyes are exposed to light then Melatonin can get confused. When a child or adolescent has a screen close to their eyes it will affect their Melatonin and delay their sleepiness.

3. The third reason why screen use at bedtime is important is because what they're watching can disturb their sleep. For example, if they are engaging in social media and the conversation on that social media is alerting, exciting, scary, mean, nasty, depressing - all of these things tap into the emotions of our children and then that disturbs their capacity to be calm at bedtime. Some of those activities can be even very, very extreme. If we

have a game that is being played that is alerting, which makes us want to keep playing that game, which makes us want to win that game, we are hardly going to give up that game to go to sleep.

How old your child is depends on how much they're affected by the content of what they're watching. Children under 8, for example, can be more affected by some of the things that they watch on television because they can't differentiate between reality and fantasy. Over 8 they can become very frightened by the real things that happen on our TV screens. Even the nightly news can make it difficult for our children to be calm enough to go to sleep.

What can you as parents do to help your children reduce their screen exposure at night time?

As parents we have the necessary and responsible position of negotiating rules around bedtime and screen time in our children. We know that when rules are clear and negotiated they're more likely to be successful and screen use can be reduced at night time. Those rules around how much screen exposure our children can be exposed to at night are very important. In fact the earlier we start regulating screen use at bedtime the better off our children will be. Try and help your children stop using screens at least 30 minutes before bedtime. That will allow Melatonin enough time to kick in and get the body system ready for sleep. Additionally taking screens out of bedrooms is going to reduce the temptation and allow children and adolescents to get better sleep. And finally we should really role model good sleep habits for our children and adolescents. Showing our children we can also restrict our own screen exposure is very important. They watch and learn everything that we do. So the more we do the more they'll do.

In summary we know that good sleep is important for good health and is the foundation of mental, physical and emotional health. Monitoring screen usage at bedtime is really important for we as parents and our children, and negotiating those rules with them is equally important and more successful. Turning off screens at least 30 minutes before bedtime and perhaps replacing it with a calming and alternative bedtime routine will allow our children and adolescents to get better sleep, better health and a good restful night.

You can get further advice and support from:

- School
- School Nurse
- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/>