



My child isn't sleeping.

Sleep is an essential part of wellbeing and according to the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center, the average teen needs about nine hours of sleep each night to feel alert and well rested. But when there are mental health issues, sleep can become a challenge for them - and you.

Q: ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT THEY'RE NOT SLEEPING, OR THAT THEY'RE NOT SLEEPING WHEN YOU EXPECT THEM TO?

There are many reasons why your child may not be sleeping and it can change depending on their age. Some of them could be:

Emotional - An emotional response, unresolved worries, such as anxiety or stress, fears of nightmares

Physical - A physical issue like pain or an uncomfortable bed or pillows or changes in their sleep patterns due to hormones, for example after puberty, their circadian rhythms make them sleepy at 10-11pm, rather than 8-9pm.

External - Poor sleep hygiene

Behavioural - Reasons that keep them awake - maybe they get more attention or 1-1 time at bed time than at other times in the day? Maybe their social life is online in a different country? Do the behaviours in the house change when your child goes to bed? Are they missing out on something when they go to bed, or feel they are?

Medical - Side effects from medication, or insomnia - defined by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine's ICSD-3 manual, as "persistent difficulty with sleep initiation, duration, consolidation or quality."

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW AS A PARENT?

There will be times in your child's life when they will struggle more with sleep than others. It's worth exploring why, because your child's sleep issues may give you a greater insight into their emotional and physical needs.

Focus on helping your child deal with the cause, rather than the resulting insomnia. Anxiety can be worsened by insomnia as it may contribute to a retention of negative memories and stop young



people from experiencing a restful sleep and benefitting from processing all the emotions that can often happen through sleep.

According to the Harvard Medical Centre, 90% of young people with depression suffer with some kind of sleep disorder and they are also common in children and adolescents with anxiety. One sleep laboratory study found that youngsters with an anxiety disorder took longer to fall asleep, and slept less deeply, when compared with a control group of healthy children. Insomnia can worsen the symptoms of anxiety disorders or prevent recovery.

But insomnia to you may be just staying up late to your child. It may look the same to you, but there are different reasons for it. A child with chronic depression might be up all night because their mind might not allow them to rest. Another child might choose to be up all night because they are playing games with friends on another time zone.

https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/sleep-and-mental-health

Just because your child isn't sleeping doesn't mean you can't - parents still have a right to sleep! If they are safe, make sure you get your own sleep in.

Telling a young person to get to sleep

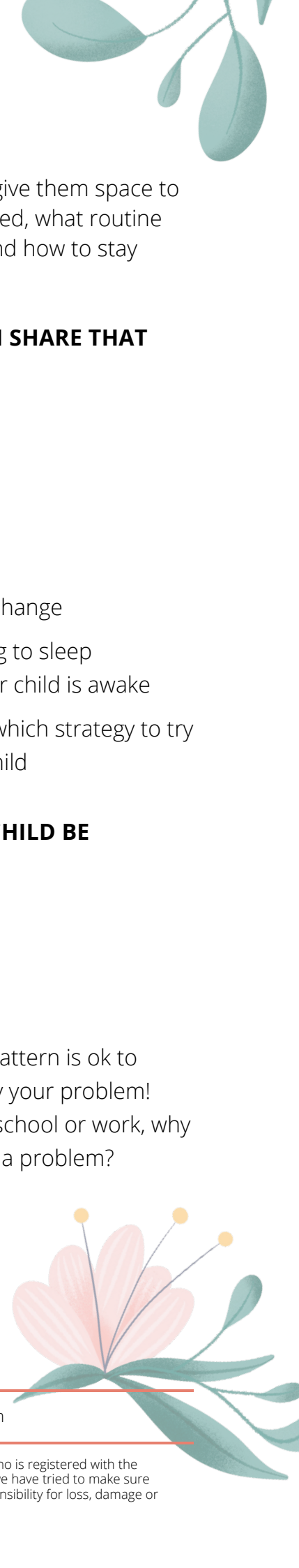
doesn't tend to help - give them space to work out how to get tired, what routine supports their sleep and how to stay asleep.

MANY PARENTS CAN SHARE THAT THEY FEEL...

- ✓ Exhausted
- ✓ Frustrated
- ✓ Worried
- ✓ Hopeless
- ✓ Unable to effect change
- ✓ Guilty about going to sleep themselves if their child is awake
- ✓ Confused about which strategy to try or use for their child

HOW MIGHT YOUR CHILD BE FEELING?

- ✓ Tired
- ✓ Nagged!
- ✓ Misunderstood
- ✓ That their sleep pattern is ok to them - it's actually your problem! And if they're off school or work, why are you making it a problem?





WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Understand the differences between insomnia and living at the other end of the day - is the lack of sleep driven by anxiety or by a social need to belong?

Understand that your child may have more reasons to be awake than to go to sleep.

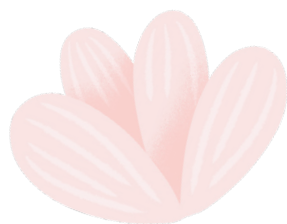
Recognise that your child isn't up all night to annoy you, they are awake because of something - it may be social connection, a chance to catch up on homework or TV, or the only time the house is quiet.

GAMING'S IMPACT ON SLEEP

It may be that your child is gaming and this is keeping them awake. Explore the pros and cons of gaming with them and discuss the reasons why they're staying awake.

SOME GOOD THINGS ABOUT GAMING:

- ✓ Social interaction
- ✓ Connection
- ✓ Growth
- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Career prospects



THE FLIP SIDE:

- ✗ Missing school because of sleep issues
- ✗ Lack of connection with people 'in real life'
- ✗ Poor nutrition

GAMING AND SLEEP

Excitement from gaming can hinder sleep because dopamine is released into the body - it's a hormone and neurotransmitter that, when released in higher amounts, goes beyond the synapse and flows to other parts of the brain and produces a pleasure response. This feeling is addictive for us all, and even more so for someone struggling with low mood, low confidence or depression. Gaming may give the only dopamine hit they get in the day and this is linked strongly to the reward centre in the brain. Rewards mean "I'm good enough" - so gaming can be the only positive in their world.

Removing access to gaming is likely to do more harm than good psychologically. This is something your child enjoys and there may be little in their work that brings them pleasure. But a compromise needs to be reached - especially if your child's gaming impacts on your sleep. Conversations about gaming are more likely to be positive when you take an interest and understand the reasons

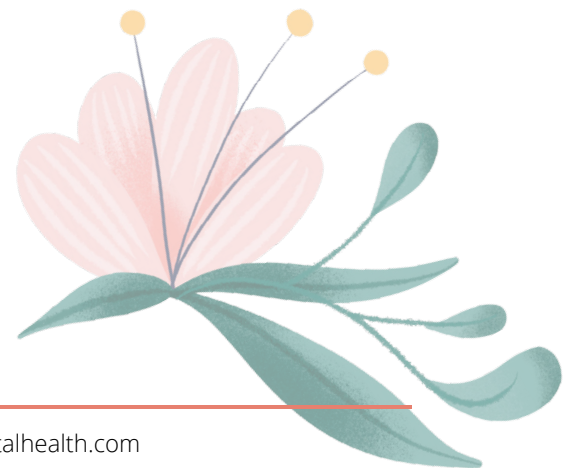




behind your child's interest. Be curious, ask questions and reserve judgement - be clear about what your concerns are, don't throw blame around.

TOOLS AND TIPS

- ✔ Make their room a haven for sleep:
- ✔ What does their bed need to make it extra comfy? A mattress topper? A weighted blanket?
- ✔ Does your child like their bedroom? Make it their own space to relax in - mood lighting, colours that they've chosen, bedding they like.
- ✔ Keep the room sleep ready - check the temperature, lighting and noise
- ✔ Use thick curtains, blinds or an eye mask to stop them being disturbed by light
- ✔ Use earplugs to stop any noise disturbing them
- ✔ Put a notebook and pen next to their bed so they can write down any thoughts, dreams or worries
- ✔ Keep a glass of water by their bed so they don't need to get up
- ✔ Try to keep regular sleep hours, even if that is bed at 2am and up at lunchtime.
- ✔ Where are pets sleeping - is the dog annoying them? Is the hamster keeping them awake?
- ✔ Get them to exercise regularly in the day if possible to try to use some of the excess energy
- ✔ Avoid caffeine and energy drinks later in the day
- ✔ Avoid eating late as your body is processing when it should be resting and this interferes with sleep
- ✔ Avoid watching TV or using computers or mobile devices in the bedroom before bed
- ✔ Suggest a warm bath an hour before bed; listening to calming music or reading a book
- ✔ Work out how much sleep they are actually getting - it may be more than you think. If they're open to it, a health tracker can help here. Or count the hours from when you wake up, as a minimum.



TRY TO AVOID...

- ✗ Judging your child - this is unlikely to be a problem to them and they aren't doing this to annoy you. It is a complex situation
- ✗ Making it a battleground
- ✗ Making it the only thing you converse about
- ✗ Catastrophising - many teenagers struggle with sleep and it changes over time. It doesn't mean your child will always struggle.

ASK YOURSELF...

- Does your child understand why sleep is important?
- Do they see the correlation between quality sleep and positive mental health?
- Can I align the benefits of sleep with the things that are important to them?

More information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/>
www.sleepio.com

