



Is text messaging contributing to sleep deprivation?

Are you encouraging your teen to develop responsible mobile phone behaviour?

Most kids go to sleep with their phone plugged in right by their bed or even under their pillow. Every ping or vibration of an incoming message is a temptation to pick up the phone. They know talking on the phone might wake up their parents, but if they text, it probably won't.

Teens are famously sleep-deprived already, but experts say some are compounding the problem by staying up into the middle of the night to silently type messages to friends on their phones. Teens need on average 9 hours sleep per night, but often only manage 7.5 hours. This leaves them with a sleep debt resulting in poor performance, moodiness and irritability and a higher risk of developing depression.

With changing biorhythms, teens do naturally stay up later -- but not that late . In addition to needing more sleep, adolescents experience a "phase shift" during puberty, falling asleep later at night than do younger children. The brain's circadian timing system-- controlled mainly by melatonin-- switches on later at night as pubertal development progresses. Later on, in middle-age, the clock appears to shift back, making it hard for parents to stay awake just when their teens are at their most alert.

Like surfing the Internet or watching TV, text- messaging tends to energise teens rather than help them fall asleep .Nearly a quarter of teens in a relationship have communicated with a boyfriend or girlfriend hourly between midnight and 5 a.m. via snapchat or texting. It is during these hours that new brain cells and neural connections or "wires" which connect the right and left sides of the brain and are critical to intelligence, self-awareness and performance, grow like branches on a tree. Daytime stimulation, in the form of school and social interaction, gets "hard-wired" into the adolescent brain during the latter stages of sleep, including REM sleep.

Cut these sleep stages short and performance suffers the next day. If you want to learn really well and to be really efficient in your learning, the best way to do it is to get a good night's sleep. Get the mobile phones, tablets and TV's out of their rooms, turn off the computer and encourage some light reading in bed before going to sleep. Light's out devices out!



What to do with too much texting

1. Keep phones out of bedrooms. Make an agreement that the phone stays on a charger in the kitchen or away from the bedrooms
2. Turn it off. Switch it off half an hour before bedtime. Putting it on silent is not good enough.
3. Check the bill for late night calls - if they have broken the agreement about not using the phone once they are in bed then the consequence should be to confiscate it for a day or two
4. Enlist other parents - Polite society used to frown on phone calls after 9 p.m. Network with other parents of teens to agree on community standards.
5. Stop rescuing - if you're still getting your kids up in the morning, give up that job. It's time they took on that responsibility and managed the consequences of being late if they don't get up in time. Parents should be clear that a parental ride or excuse note is not an option. We parents need to stop protecting kids from the natural results of their actions.

Your action steps for this month

- Sit down with the teenagers in your family and create an agreement around responsible mobile phone use
- Hold them accountable to the agreement you jointly make
- Make the consequence, if they break the agreement, a logical, related consequence
- Confiscate the phone for a day or two (not a month!)
- Restate the terms of the agreement

"I cannot always control what goes on outside, but I can always control what goes on inside."

Wayne Dyer