



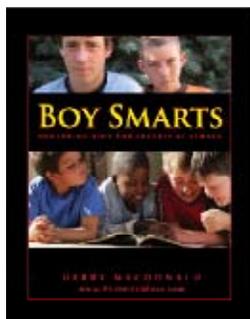
FINDING SLEEP

Dear Barry,

My teenage son has crazy sleep patterns that make me shake my head. He stays up late reading or watching video on his smartphone and then doesn't want to get up for school the next morning. Getting him up and out the door for school feels like a never-ending battle, and I also lose sleep when I check in on him to make sure that his lights are out. Even if he arrives to school on time, I honestly think that he is half asleep and probably doesn't really wake up until mid-morning. I anticipate that the transition back to school will be difficult for us both again this year. Your suggestions would be appreciated.

Kirstin

Calgary, AB



Dear Kristin,

When kids return to school and adjust their sleep routines, parents often lament the peculiar sleeping patterns of teenage boys. They wonder how their sons find the energy to play computer games until late at night, but can't find the energy to get out of bed in time for school. In my consulting office, parents describe night-owl boys who will sleep fully dressed for the next day, hit the snooze button repeatedly, and finally stumble out the door without breakfast, planning to grab a Red Bull on the way to class. Well aware that sleep deficiency reduces the ability to pay attention, and may also heighten the chances of reckless or risky behaviour, parents have grounds for concern.



In August of 2014 the American Academy of Pediatrics called sleep deprivation the most common, significant, and potentially remediable public-health risk for adolescents. According to Dr. Jay Giedd, chief of the unit on brain imaging in the child psychiatry branch at the National Institute of Mental Health, brain scans of randomly selected teens indicate that 40% are sleep deprived. Although the National Sleep Foundation recommends that teens get 8.5 to 9.25 hours of sleep, the 2013 *National Youth Risk Behavior Survey* found on any given school night, only 30% of teens report getting 8 or more hours of sleep.

Our round-the-clock access to online information, entertainment, and interaction is pushing bedtime further and further away for many of us—but especially teens. For many, being plugged in equates to having status. For others, the cell phone has replaced the teddy bear as a kind of security blanket. Last year 82% of teens in British Columbia reported to the McCreary Centre Society that they were online or on their phone after they were supposed to be asleep. According to the McCreary survey of 30,000 Grade 7-12 students, those youth who slept 9 or more hours the night before completing the survey were more likely than students who got less sleep to report that their mental health was good or excellent. Furthermore, with each additional hour of sleep that students got, ratings of good or excellent mental health went up, with consistent findings for students in every grade.

Restful sleep allows the brain to recover from daily stress, and also helps growth hormones to be optimally released, but chronic sleep deprivation results in a host of problems. Sleep deprivation can impair memory, reduce concentration, and inhibit creativity. Many teens are subject to irritability, low self-confidence, and mood swings, but sleep deprivation makes typically unpredictable emotions even harder to manage. At its worst, chronic sleep problems can endanger immune systems and trigger depression. Sleep deprivation accumulates over time and can't be eliminated by a simple power nap or an extra long lie-in on the weekend.

When a parent and teenage son argue about bedtime routines, late night digital media are easy targets of blame, but teenage sleep patterns may not be simply stubbornness or laziness. According to Reut Gruber, a psychiatry professor at McGill University in Montreal and chair of the Canadian Sleep Society's pediatric sleep group, recent research suggests that the hormonal changes of puberty could be causing adolescents to detest turning in too early at night and linger reading, texting, and playing video games until quite late. Gruber indicates that during puberty, teenagers' sleep-wake schedule shift with changes in the circadian rhythm.

Research suggests that while most adults start to produce melatonin at about 10 p.m., teenagers, who typically begin to produce the hormone at 1 a.m., then find it difficult to go to bed early and be alert first thing in the morning.

While critics emphasize that late night media stimulates the brain and exposes the teenagers to light that could delay the release of melatonin, a long trail of mounting evidence indicates that the hormonal upheaval of puberty that pushes the melatonin release back alters teen sleeping patterns. Parents who are tempted to quote Ben Franklin's motto they may remember from their own youth—"Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise"—might consider the latest research as they think of how to promote more high quality sleep for everyone:

Limit Screen Time

Was it only two decades ago, that television and the telephone were the primary culprits for sleep distraction? Now teens have smartphones, tablets and electronic games to keep them hyper absorbed into the small hours. Some parents may have need to make more compromises with the ever-present reality of digital media than they want to; yet we all need to ensure that our days and nights are not completely overtaken by flashing lights, clicks, pings, and beeps. Remember that your children were born into a digital world, and may need you to remind them there is a three-dimensional tactile world of air, light, laughter beyond the digital one. You might also gently remind your teen that you are paying attention to how much time he's on a screen: "Haven't you been on your phone long enough for now?" You'll more likely get your son's cooperation if you recruit him to help the whole family decide how much time everyone should spend with media each day. Screen-time rules will be easier for your son to follow if he has some input.

Parents should also be mindful of their own digital habits and lead by example. Although teenage boys may not seem to pay attention to what you do or say, remember that you are still his most important role model.

So you can't tell him to cut back on screen time if you're watching endless hours of TV, texting while you're driving, or eating dinner with your Samsung on the table. Consider leaving media devices in the kitchen to be recharged overnight. Some families even agree to lock devices in a kitchen drawer. Young adults sometimes pile their cell phones on the table at a restaurant, and the first person to reach for it has to pay the bill; maybe some variation on this game could work in your family.

Delay School Start Times

Sleep experts have long argued the benefits of aligning school start times with teen biological clocks. Yet, even though 33% of teens indicate that they fall asleep in school, the National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2012 that 43% of American high schools start before 8 a.m.. Mary Carskadon, the director of the sleep research laboratory at Bradley Hospital in East Providence, advocates that later school start times for teens reduce tardiness, absenteeism, and risk of metabolic and nutritional deficits associated with insufficient sleep—including obesity—while also increasing grades, improving mood and focussed attention.

**BOY
SMARTS
ACTION
TALK**

Victoria
September 27, 2014

Vancouver
October 4, 2014

Calgary
October 18, 2014

Edmonton
November 22, 2014

© 2014 Barry MacDonald - MentoringBoys.com

In recent years, Canadian high schools across the country have been exploring the idea of ringing the morning bell later. If your local high school start time is too early, get in touch with the school administrator and Parent Advisory Council to advocate a later start. At the very least, encourage your son to take his more challenging classes later in the day if possible.

Guard Your Sleep

Interestingly, scientists at Duke University in Durham have discovered that women generally need more sleep than men. As well as a higher risk of heart disease, depression and psychological problems, sleep-deprived women have extra clotting factors in their blood, which can lead to a stroke. While all parents should set a good example, moms especially should guard their sleep.

Several years ago I received this delightful story from a long-time mentor, Edna Nash, who also taught for many years at the University of British Columbia and has since passed away. If you are having difficulty catching up on your sleep, you might really appreciate Edna's story:

"An older, tired-looking dog wandered into a neighbour's yard. The neighbour could tell from the dog's grooming and well-fed belly that the dog was lovingly cared for. The dog calmly approached the neighbour and appeared delighted with a few gentle pats on the back. As the neighbour returned into her home, the dog slowly followed her inside and walked down the hall and curled up in the corner and fell asleep. An hour later, the dog went to the door, and the neighbour let it out. The next day the dog was back and again entered the house to resume the spot in the hall and slept for about an hour before departing. This continued off and on for several weeks. Curious, the neighbour pinned a note to the dog's collar that read, "I would like to find out who the guardian of this wonderful sweet dog is and to ask if you are aware that almost every afternoon your dog comes to our house for a nap." The next day the dog arrived for his nap again, with a different note pinned to his collar: "Our poor dog lives in a home with 6 children, 2 under the age of 5 and one teenager. He must be trying to catch up on his sleep. Can I come and nap with him tomorrow?"

Edna's story reminds us how much we all need uninterrupted sleep. As Shakespeare said in a play that some of your sons may be reading in high school, we need...

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast. ●●●

Barry MacDonald
MentoringBoys.com



HELPING BOYS THRIVE!

Surrey, BC - October 24



The challenges associated with being male vary from community to community. I welcome the opportunity to meet you at an upcoming workshop or conference to discuss the needs of your boys.

