

IS MY CHILD GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

Many children go through their days sleep-deprived. When children do not get enough sleep their actions can be wrongly classified as “behavior problems.” Due to lack of sleep, they may have trouble controlling their emotions. This happens because the part of the brain that helps us regulate our responses and actions is greatly affected by the amount of sleep we get.

Parents are sometimes unsure of actually how much sleep a child needs. The chart below was created using data from the University of Michigan Health System. It shows you a ballpark amount of sleep a child needs.

AGE	TOTAL HOURS OF SLEEP NEEDED
Infant	16 hours, including naps
Toddler	14 hours, including 1 or 2 naps
Preschool	12 hours, including a nap
Elementary	11 hours a night
Middle School	10 hours a night

The chart lists the average amount of sleep for each age group. Some children need a bit more sleep or are able to do well with a little less sleep. The goal is to ensure that your child is getting the right amount for him/her. Ask yourself these questions to determine if your child is sleep-deprived:

- Can my child fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes?
- Does he wake easily from his sleep?
- Is she awake and alert throughout the day?
- Does my child often fall asleep in the car?
- Does he seem irritable, very emotional, aggressive or hyperactive during the day?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, your child may be sleep-deprived. Here are some tips that can help your child get that much-needed rest:

- Pick a natural bedtime when your child gets physically tired and begins to slow down.
- Create a consistent, simple bedtime ritual. Include quiet activities such as a song, a story, a bath and calm, quiet cuddling. End the routine with turning the lights down and saying “goodnight.”
- Allow only two comfort items for sleeping – any more could be distracting.
- Be consistent and firm about the purpose of bedtime. Bedtime is for laying in the bed and falling asleep.
- Use bedtime as an enjoyable, resting, cuddling and sleeping time, never as punishment.
- Use dim lights for sleeping times and brighter lights during awake times.
- Avoid foods and drinks that contain caffeine throughout the day.

Sleep deprivation can cause behavior-related problems that affect your child’s daily interactions with others. Children who get enough sleep are better prepared to regulate their emotions, think clearer and enjoy their day.