

Back to School Sleep Schedule

School is getting started for kids across the region, and one of the major back-to-school battles that plagues parents is the daily wake up call. Getting your kids out of bed early after a summer of sleeping in can be a tough task.

Dr. Sarah Zallek is the medical director for the OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute Sleep Center. She says providing a good sleep schedule is one of the best things you can do for your kids to help with classroom success.

“Sleep is really important for school for a bunch of reasons, including being awake, but also being alert, and attentive, paying attention, not just staying awake. And also being able to learn. Cognition, learning, memory are all affected by not having enough sleep, even if you’re not sleepy,” explained Dr. Zallek.

Getting back to early mornings can be tough for kids after a less-rigid summer schedule, and while starting a school-time sleep schedule before the first bell rings is recommended, it’s never too late to start a new sleep routine. Dr. Zallek says routine is the key word.

“If you have sort of a routine that happens relatively the same each night: dinner, playtime, bath time, story time, brush teeth, however you do it. Having kind of the same routine each night helps the child consciously and unconsciously realize that it’s time for sleep to happen,” she said.

Kids do require more sleep than adults. School aged children should get an average of 10 hours of sleep a night by age 10. But how do you know if your child is well rested and ready to hit the books? According to Dr. Zallek, sleep deprived kids exhibit specific symptoms.

“If your child is sleepy, falling asleep or feeling like they have to resist sleep during the daytime, that’s the first clue,” said Dr. Zallek. “The second clue is if they are inattentive or not paying attention or not sitting still, all those can be related to not getting enough sleep.”

And if bedtime comes with some bumps in the road, Dr. Zallek has some tips to help get kids ready for a restful night.

- 1. Cut out caffeine all together**

To help children sleep well at night, they should be tapered off of caffeine for the school year. Children metabolize caffeine more slowly than adults and, according to Zallek, there is no need for a well-rested child to consume caffeine. Children should be wide awake during the daytime. Reduce caffeine by half a serving every day or every other day. Reducing caffeine too drastically can cause headaches, crankiness and tiredness.

- 2. Reserve the bed and bedroom for sleeping only**

The bed and the bedroom should be places reserved for sleeping, and no other activities. This conditions the brain to fall asleep in bed. A child’s bed should not be used for playing or

watching television. Also, the bedroom should not be used for timeouts as a disciplinary technique.

3. **Prioritize sleep**

Sleep should be a protected activity in the house. Put a focus on sleep and model good sleep habits for your children. Sleep is just as important to a healthy life as is diet and exercise and should not be secondary to everything else.

4. **Model good sleep behavior**

As a parent, an effective way to get children to understand the importance of sleep and adopt good sleep habits is to adopt good sleep habits yourself.