

TEENS AND DIGITALLY-INTERRUPTED SLEEP

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President

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Here at CPYU, one of our goals is to see young people flourish in life. This begins with pointing them to a restored relationship with their Creator. From there, we want to see them integrate their faith into every nook and cranny of their lives. The Gospel speaks to all of life and should lead us to live counter-cultural lives of worship which give glory to God (Romans 12:1&2). In recent years, we’ve seen the need to guide parents and teens into an understanding of what it means to glorify God in the ways in which we use the good gifts of technology and social media. One area of growing concern is how often we are engaged with our devices, sometimes at the cost of uninterrupted sleep.

Digital Natives

For kids today (a.k.a digital natives), uninterrupted deep sleep is akin to pay phones, black and white TVs, transistor radios, and other obsolete remnants of their parents’ “olden days.” Researchers tell us that teenagers have always needed just over nine hours of uninterrupted sleep for healthy physical and emotional development. But judging from what the research is telling us

about new patterns of adolescent sleep, healthy physical and emotional teenage development is in jeopardy of becoming a thing of the past. Teenage pressures and distractions are on the increase, while good old-fashioned uninterrupted sleep is on the decline.

Today’s youth culture is a world filled with non-stop activities, very little downtime, increased pressure to achieve, and those ever present smartphones and other digital devices. Because they want to stay connected, they don’t want to miss anything, and they are increasingly addicted to their phones, the great majority of smartphone owning children and teens now sleep with their phones.

Researchers tell us that 89% of teenagers keep at least one device in their bedroom at night. While 36% of teens sleep with their phone in their bed or on their pillow, it’s reasonable to assume that most others keep the phone within reach by placing it on a beside stand or on the floor next to their bed. Six out of 10 kids ages 11 to 17 use their phones between midnight and 5am on school nights. About 70% of our kids who sleep with smartphones wake up to check





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them within 30 minutes of falling asleep, and one-third of all teens admit to waking up in the middle of the night to use their phones for something other than seeing what time it is.

A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that children ages 6 to 18 had an 88% higher risk of not getting enough sleep when they had their smartphones in their bedroom, and 53% had a higher risk of getting a bad night's

sleep when they had their phones in their bedrooms for just three nights a week. Kids are waking at regular intervals to check texts and social media updates. And, even when they do nod off, the glow from electronic screens has been shown to suppress the production of melatonin, which aids

“DON'T ALLOW YOUR TEENS TO SLEEP WITH SMARTPHONES IN THEIR ROOM.”

healthy, deep sleep. Not only are our kids not getting the uninterrupted sleep that they need, but they wind-up spending their days under-performing and struggling to pay attention due to fatigue. It should come as no surprise that 90% of our kids are not getting enough sleep.

Health Dangers

Healthcare professionals are sounding loud warnings regarding the dangers associated with digitally-interrupted sleep. These dangers include:

Anxiety/Depression. Counselors who screen patients for anxiety and depression will oftentimes first ask patients about their sleep. Not getting enough sleep not only leads to anxiety and depression, but will make it worse.

Poor Academic Achievement. Several studies indicate a result that is not at all surprising, that kids who are sleep-deprived are not only sleepy during the school day, but a reduction in cognitive performance skills results in decreased academic performance and lower grades.

Obesity. People who don't sleep enough tend to crave and eat more food.

Heart Disease. A lack of sleep leads to greater stress, which in turn can elevate blood pressure and increase the risk of strokes and heart disease.

Decreased neurologic function. Not only does a lack of sleep lead to fatigue and decreased attention span, but it also effects driving and reaction time. Sleep impaired driving has been equated to driving while alcohol-impaired with a blood alcohol content of .08%.

Aggressive and inappropriate behavior. When you're tired, you tend to get grumpy.

Action Steps

Because we desire to teach our kids to glorify God in every nook and cranny of their lives, we must communicate these same warnings to our children and teens in the hope that we can convince them to “sleep counter-culturally,” worshipping God through good stewardship of their bodies and rest.

Do not allow your children and teens to sleep with any devices in their room. Kids should not have smartphones, tablets, computers, or televisions in their room.

Keep your child's phone in a secure place to charge overnight. Turn the phone off so that notifications are silenced.

Expect pushback from your child. Perhaps they will accuse you of a lack of trust. Let them know that your action is not due to mistrust, but to responsibly stewarding your role as parent to protect them from any harm that lack of sleep might cause.

Remind your child that God has created our bodies for a rhythm of work and rest. A lack of sleep will undermine their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

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