Screen Time

How do screens -- such as TV and smartphones -- affect my kids' sleep?

While the connection between poor sleep and bedroom TVs is well-established, the effect of small screens -- smartphones, iPods, tablets, or other small-screen devices -- on kids' sleep hasn't been studied until recently. A report released in 2017 by the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that they're just as worrisome -- but for different reasons than TVs.

Television's glare and audio volume obviously robs kids of sleep, but a small screen can inhibit sleep in other ways: by occupying kids when they should be sleeping, keeping their brains and bodies alert with interactivity, throwing off their natural sleep rhythm, and interrupting sleep with notifications. In the study, kids reported not sleeping as well and feeling as though they didn't get enough rest when they snoozed near a small screen.

A lot of attention has been paid to the issue of blue light -- the high-energy, short-wavelength light that's present in sunlight but hyper-concentrated in device displays. Blue light interferes with our natural sleep rhythms and researchers are examining how much device use late at night impacts kids' sleep due to blue light specifically. Some say a lot, some say a little. But most experts agree that regardless of the blue light, devices cause sleep disruption just by being present in the room where you're trying to sleep.

Evidence is mounting that a longer duration of sleep is actually more important for teens than little kids, due to the physical and cognitive growth spurts in this phase of development. Staying up too late can make kids cranky -- but there are real health risks, too. Obesity, poor school performance, even behavioral problems can stem from inadequate sleep. Parents of tweens and teens need to really double down on making sure everyone is getting enough sleep -- and that often means grappling with device use, which keeps everyone up later. Unfortunately, even though we know we should stricter about kids' device use and our own and maintaining consistent, device-free, bedtime routines, we're slacking. If you're not familiar with the recommended daily amount of sleep for each age, it's sobering to read the American Academy of Pediatrics' guidelines.

Having good "sleep hygiene" is critical to overall well-being, and it's something parents should do their best to model. It's not always possible to clear the bedroom of all screens -- but instruct your kids to turn them off, download apps that disable the device at bedtime, and charge devices in your room at night to help your kids get
How do screens -- such as TV and smartphones -- affect my kids’ sleep? The rest they need. And of course, make sure you're getting the sleep you need, too. Your kids will pick up on your habits (and you’ll rest better, too).

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