

Misbehaving or Missing Sleep?

The 2004 Sleep in America poll revealed that almost everyone, on average, is not getting the amount of sleep they need. Preschoolers are getting 10.4 hours of sleep, but 11-13 hours are recommended for children ages 3 to 5 years.

Jodi A. Mindell, PhD, chair of the 2004 Poll Task Force said, "It is clear from the poll results that we need to focus as much on the sleeping half of children's lives as we do on the waking half. Children are clearly not getting enough sleep."

One surprise is that 27% of preschoolers consume caffeine. Children who drink caffeinated beverages sleep less than those who don't.



Well-known parent author and educator, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, in her book, **Sleepless in America**, asks, "Is your child misbehaving or missing sleep?" Kurcinka says, "Behind every power struggle, every temper tantrum, every instance of misbehavior, there is a feeling and need—too often that need is sleep. It's easy to miss the connection between the poor behavior and lack of sleep, thrown off by the whining, the attitude, and tears." When a child's misbehavior is the result of missed sleep, you really can make a difference. Check behaviors that apply to your child.

Emotions

How well is your child coping with frustration, dealing with surprises, and managing anger? Look for these reactions:

- Unsatisfied; nothing is right, no matter what you offer
- Upset by changes in routine or surprises
- Experiences frequent stomach or headaches
- Difficult to calm or comfort
- Losing it over little things
- Irritable and cranky
- Easily frustrated
- Easily overwhelmed
- Anxious and resistant

Well rested children are on a more even keel. Transitions go more smoothly.

Social Situations

- Experiences hurt feelings easily
- Has difficulty being patient
- Suffers from separation anxiety
- Is bossy and demanding
- Loses it if told "no"
- Has difficulty solving age-appropriate problems, or talking things through
- Easily forgets the rules or wants to debate them
- Is irritated by siblings and peers, especially in late afternoons
- Is not open to your guidance

If your child argues with you or others, lack of sleep may be the issue.

The Body

How well does your child control body and movements? Is your child's movements smooth and energetic or "wired?"

- Clumsy with frequent accidents, falls and injuries
- Frenzied, hyperactivity
- Wild at bedtime; can't fall asleep even when tired
- Hits, throws things, or shouts
- Gets sick more often than other children
- Craves carbohydrates or sugar
- Lethargic; can't seem to do what is usually capable of doing
- Seems unable to stop from breaking rules

Sleep can help your child slow his body, honor rules, be less accident prone, stay healthy, and fall asleep more easily.

Attention, Focus, and Performance

- Loses focus, wanders from one activity to another
- Needs your attention and help to stay on task
- Seeks stimulation to keep going—annoying siblings or pets, wants to watch TV, especially in the late afternoon
- Is forgetful
- Struggles to make decisions
- Doesn't listen
- Has difficulty performing at peak level or resists participating altogether
- Talks excessively
- Finds it difficult to work without disrupting others

If your child is struggling to stay focused and pay attention, lack of sleep may be the culprit.

Count up the number of items you marked. Many children act these ways for other reasons than sleep, for example, they have sensitive temperaments or are slow to

develop self-control. But if you checked many items, the problem may actually be lack of sleep.

Well rested children are more likely to behave themselves. They can more easily be independent, helpful, and cooperative. Tired children get into trouble more easily. When children are exhausted, it is rare that they will tell you. Watch carefully; your child's behavior will show you.

Help Your Preschooler Sleep

- Have a regular and consistent sleep schedule.
- Provide a relaxing bedtime routine of 15-30 minutes of calm activities (reading, talking, or quiet playing) that end in the room where your child sleeps.
- Arrange for a room that is cool, quiet and dark – and without a TV. Shorter sleep times are associated with more TV watching, raising a flag about TV sets in bedrooms.
- Surprisingly, some children have difficulty getting to sleep when they are OVER-tired, so try to start your bedtime routine when you see the early signs of tiredness.



Sources:

Kurcinka, M.S. (2006). *Sleepless in America*. New York: Harper Collins.

The sleep of america's children. Retrieved May 1, 2006, National Sleep Foundation web site:

www.sleepforkids.org

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