

Sleep routines set kids up for success at school

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Late night movies, gaming marathons and impromptu sleepovers may have featured over the holidays, but as we near a new school term, UniSA sleep experts say it's time to settle kids back into a regular sleep routine.

Dr. Stephanie Centofanti and Dr. Alex Agostini from UniSA Online say modifying sleep routines now will allow enough time for children's body clocks to adjust to a new schedule before [school](#) starts.

"Just like jet lag, changing to a new sleep routine can take time," Dr. Centofanti says.

"Throughout the school holidays, families and children have relaxed their schedules, perhaps sleeping in in the mornings and staying up later at night. But with the school term nearly upon us, it's important to start settling back into regular routines.

"Easing kids into consistent and predictable routines helps them avoid difficulties associated with sleepiness, irritability and paying attention in the first weeks back at school. So, it's important that parents start the process now.

"Making small changes to your child's routine over time—perhaps moving their bedtime by five or ten minutes each night—can adjust their biological rhythms more easily. And if you have kids who sleep in, make sure you wake them a little earlier each day."

Research shows that a good sleep routine is important for children's emotional, physical, and mental health, especially post the school holidays. Globally, almost one in seven children and adolescents (aged 10–17 years) will experience a mental health disorder.

With the uncertainties surrounding schools amid COVID-19, a

consistent sleep routine can help managing stress and anxiety. Dr. Agostini says maintaining a consistent routine each day is vital for healthy sleep.

"Having a relaxing pre-bed routine and going to bed at the same time every night can teach the body when it's time to fall asleep. This can make falling asleep easier, leading to a longer and more restful night's sleep," Dr. Agostini says.

"We recommend parents sit down with their children to design a pre-bed routine that will be relaxing for their child. This might include a bath, reading a book, listening to music, or even talking about tomorrow's plans. The important thing is getting kids involved in this process to ensure their buy-in.

"Technology use can be a big issue when it comes to getting enough sleep, so it can help if the whole family decides to put down all phones before bed.

"Setting clear boundaries around technology use is critical so that it doesn't creep into the late evening hours when kids should be preparing for sleep.

"Remember that sleep needs change with age and are different for every child. Take cues from your child's behavior and sleepiness levels over the first few weeks of school and adjust their bedtime routines accordingly.

"Nobody wants a cranky kid in the morning—a regular, predictable and relaxing bed routine will help get your child off to sleep and start the day in the best way possible."

Top tips for children's sleep:

- Exercise in the sunshine during the day
- Avoiding [bright light](#) in the evening
- Cut technology at night ([blue light](#) impedes sleep)
- Choose lighter meals in the evening
- Keep the bedroom dark, cool and quiet
- Get kids involved in designing their own bedtime routine.
- Set a good sleep routine and stick to it (for example, bath, quiet time, stories).

Provided by University of South Australia

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