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## Time for Bed!

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

*Parents should live more for their children, and less for society. Study health subjects, and put your knowledge to a practical use. Teach your children to reason from cause to effect. Teach them that if they desire health and happiness, they must obey the laws of nature.*—Ministry of Healing, pg. 386

Jean shared with me how she hated to hear her mother say, “It’s time for bed.”  
“It can’t be time for bed. It’s still light outside. I’m busy playing. The other kids are playing. Listen to them! I can’t possibly go to sleep with all that racket,” Jean responded. But her mom didn’t look and she didn’t listen either. It was summer in Minnesota! Jean went to bed early all winter and she didn’t care. Jean says, “I knew that my mom was wrong, wrong, wrong!”  
According to Jean, “It happened again when I was a teenager. She would say, ‘It’s time for bed.’ And I’d say, ‘It can’t be! I’m not done with my homework. I promised to call my friend. Anyway, I’m not tired!’ Again, she didn’t listen and I knew that I was not tired. I knew that she was wrong, wrong, wrong!”

But Jean admits today that actually it turned out her mom was right. Recent research shouts the message that sleep is important not only for the body and brain growth of young children, but for the body health and brain growth for all ages—especially teens.

In her book, *Sleepless in America*, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka gathered research studies that combine a clear picture of the importance of enough sleep for children and the impact lack of sleep has on their behavior.

Consider these findings:

- Did you know that a high-energy child might have only a 15-minute window when the body is ready for sleep? Miss that and the body becomes wired for a burst of activity that looks as if the child is not tired, but it is actually a call for being asleep earlier.
- Did you know that teenagers’ body clocks change and they really do get tired later and need to sleep longer in the morning?
- Did you know that letting teens sleep all day on the weekend exacerbates the problem, and they should be awakened by 10:00 a.m.?
- Did you know that adolescents need 9.25 hours of sleep a night? If school starts early, parents really do need to say, “Time for bed” and stick with it. The kids will be healthier and smarter when they get to school.
- Did you know that missing one hour of sleep eight nights in a row impairs cognitive function as much as going 24 hours without sleep?

So how much is enough? Sleep needs vary from one person to



another; but according to Mary, here are the current recommendations:

- Infants: 14–18 hours in a 24-hour period
- Toddlers, 18–36 months: 13 hours (including naps)
- Preschoolers: 12 hours (including naps)
- School age children: 10 hours
- Adolescents, 13–18 years: 9.25 hours
- Adults: 8.5 hours

All too often our busy lives keep us from noticing that the negative behaviors of our children are often the result of poor sleep patterns and the environments we provide for them throughout the day. It’s a balancing act. Sometimes we let children stay up because we haven’t been with them during the day or because we are too exhausted to get them in bed! Sometimes we want them to attend a culturally enriching or educational experience, which requires a later bedtime. And sometimes we just want them to have some fun. However, I invite you to think about the price they and we may pay in not saying, “It’s time for bed!”

Susan Murray is a professor emeritus of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Recommended Reading: Sheedy Kurcinka, Mary. *Sleepless in America: Is Your Child Misbehaving ... or Missing Sleep?* HarperCollins: New York. (2007). Note: This book provides ideas to use and includes humorous and real life stories from parents with whom Mary has worked.

Some information for this article adapted from the newsletter, WE (29:2), 2010.