

Managing Your Child's Sleep Part Three

Managing healthy sleep habits is a multifold process. First, parents need to account for various developmental milestones that occur with young children and create a plan that will help successfully manage these when it comes to the child's sleep. Second, parents need to have a management plan for when sleep schedules are disrupted due to vacation, illness, doctor's appointments, and/or play dates. Finally, parents need to create a dialogue about the importance of sleep and help teach the child to self regulate her need for sleep.

Begin by talking about overall health. Include in the conversation what it means to be healthy on three different levels: spiritually/emotionally, physically and mentally.

Spiritually/Emotionally

You can discuss with your child the importance of giving our feelings voice. When we feel angry or hurt by someone or something then it is healthy to share those feelings in words. You can discuss the importance of being treated with respect and what that looks like. If your family has a spiritual practice then discussing the meaning of this practice and how it helps you emotionally is appropriate.

Physically

This is an obvious one for most of us and tends to be the focus. You can talk with your child about what foods are healthy for our bodies to grow and be strong. Children love to do many forms of "exercise" and play and then hear how good that is for their bodies! While it is important ingredient in our overall health, be careful not to place any more emphasis on this area than on the others.

Mentally

This is where you communicate with your child how we feed our brain. You can speak about how the brain needs good food, creative/imaginary play, reading, and schoolwork to continue growing. Although the growth of our brain peaks in the early teens, you can continually grow new neurons into old age by actively engaging your brain! You can talk about what hinders the growth of our brain: too much television and sugar and/or alcohol and drugs are other examples when your child is old enough.

Finally discuss sleep and how sleep affects *all* aspects of our health. Talk about how the family feels when everyone is rested and when not rested—be sure to

discuss individuals as you may all handle being tired differently. It is important that your children be able to detect when they are behind on their sleep, what happens when mom and dad are behind on their sleep, and how everyone can affect the rhythm of the family.

This dialogue on health can continue forever, as long as it remains age appropriate of course! You may wake up one morning and say, "I'm feeling grumpy, short tempered, energetic, happy (or whatever adjective is appropriate) because I was not able to sleep well or I am so well rested. (If not well rested) I may try to get to bed a little earlier tonight." This is called meta-cognitive thinking - thinking and processing out loud so your children are privy to your thoughts and can learn how to do this themselves. This can be applied to all three areas of our health and to all aspects of life and learning!