

Sleep Health Education in Pediatric Community Settings: Rationale and Practical Suggestions for Incorporating Healthy Sleep Education into Pediatric Practice

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KEYWORDS

- Sleep education • Pediatric practice • Adolescents • Pediatrics
- Healthy sleep

A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that an appropriate level of sleep is necessary for a healthy and productive lifestyle, academic success, and emotional well-being; these are 3 key elements associated with successful development.¹ While a considerable proportion of adolescents obtain less sleep than they need, and are thus chronically sleep deprived,² declines in sleep time and increasingly delayed bedtimes suggest the emergence of sleep restriction in preadolescents and even younger children. Adolescents have shown a gradual decrease in weeknight sleep

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time of about 1 h, with correspondingly later weeknight bedtimes and longer sleep times on weekends.²

The significance of chronic sleep insufficiency is underrecognized in the context of youth health. Whereas sufficient sleep is associated with normal metabolism and appropriate physiologic functioning, sleep deprivation has been empirically linked to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular problems.^{3–6} In addition, poor sleep has been shown to impair academic performance, learning, memory, and neurobehavioral functioning, especially in the context of activities essential for academic success; these include attention/response inhibition, memory, verbal creativity, problem solving, and general cognitive abilities as reflected by IQ test scores.⁷ Finally, poor sleep has been linked to an increase in accidental injuries in younger children⁸ and is directly related to an increased risk of motor vehicle accidents,^{9,10} a topic of increasing relevance to adolescents of driving age. Collectively, therefore, the multiple negative impacts of sleep deprivation emphasize the need to provide children and their parents with education on healthy sleep and tools that assist in achieving such sleep.

The goal of this article is to offer practical ways to incorporate healthy sleep education into pediatric practice and to discuss key questions, barriers, and strategies associated with such efforts. The authors begin by presenting the rationale for incorporating healthy sleep education in pediatric practice settings. The desirable features of sleep education programs that may be implemented in pediatric practice are then identified. Next, the authors review potential barriers to implementation and offer strategies to overcome these barriers, including development of a pool of resources applicable to healthy sleep education, and practical information that may be of use to primary health care pediatricians. Key factors that increase the effectiveness of such interventional programs are highlighted. The article ends by identifying the key points relevant to successful healthy sleep education in pediatric practice.

RATIONALE FOR INCORPORATION OF HEALTHY SLEEP EDUCATION IN PEDIATRIC SETTINGS

Despite the wealth and strength of evidence demonstrating the critical importance of sleep, and the adverse impacts of sleep deprivation, such knowledge is not widely available to children and families. The existence of problems that are potentially avoidable on application of healthy sleep education, and the difficulties currently experienced in addressing such problems, represent a “translation gap.” Given the critical nature of the domains that are adversely affected by sleep restriction, it has been suggested that the appropriate use and dissemination of knowledge on the importance of sleep, and of tools that allow environmental factors or habits related to sleep to be changed, may have significant positive impacts on the health, quality of life, and academic performance of youth.¹ Sleep education within the community or the consulting rooms of primary care pediatricians therefore offers a unique opportunity to close the gap associated with sleep education and, in so doing, to significantly improve youth health and well-being and reduce the preventable burden of disease caused by sleep deprivation.

THE DESIRABLE FEATURES OF SLEEP EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN PEDIATRIC PRACTICE

Healthy sleep education can be conducted at 3 complementary levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention encompasses interventions aimed at preventing the development of sleep deprivation by providing age-appropriate knowledge on sleep, and strategies that both ensure healthy sleep and

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