

A Parent's Guide: Late Night Technology and Sleep

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Digital media is everywhere. People use it for entertainment, school, work, and many other activities. But digital media can also be distracting and habit-forming. A large and growing body of research shows that too much media use, especially at night, can harm sleep. Put simply, smartphones, tablets, computers, and video games in the bedroom can lead to later bedtimes, less sleep, trouble falling or staying asleep, and poorer sleep quality among children and teens. Getting enough high-quality sleep is essential for physical health, emotional well-being, learning, safety, and healthy development in children and teens. This brief explains how late-night technology use can affect sleep and offers strategies parents can use and model to support healthy screen habits for their families.

Digital media can affect sleep in many ways:

1. **Sleep displacement** - When more time is spent using screens, less time is available to get ready for bed or to sleep.
2. **Psychological stimulation** - What you do on your device matters for sleep. Using it for something exciting or upsetting can make it harder to relax and fall asleep.
3. **Noise** - Devices left in the bedroom can make noises, such as beeps, pings, and alarms, that may wake you up.
4. **Light** - Screens can give off bright light that makes you feel alert and disrupts sleep. This light can suppress melatonin, a hormone that tells your body when it is time to sleep. Young children may be especially sensitive to the effects of light at night.
5. **Compulsive use** - Some types of digital media, such as social media, video games, and streaming platforms, are designed to keep users coming back. This can make it harder to fall or stay asleep because people may feel a strong urge to use their devices.

As teens grow older, they have more say in their sleep routines. Making sleep and healthy routines a family priority from an early age can help teens make better choices for themselves.

Here are strategies parents can use to improve sleep health for the whole family:

- Keep a consistent, age-appropriate bedtime on weekdays and weekends.
- Get outside during the day. Bright outdoor light, especially in the morning, may support your child's circadian rhythm and sleep.
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.

- Remove all electronic devices from the bedroom. Even when devices are not in use, there may be a temptation to take a quick look. One option is to create a central charging space for the family's devices outside the bedroom.
- Use your own device in the way you want your family to use theirs.
- Engage in relaxing, screen-free routines as a family before bedtime. Reading a paper book is a great option.
- In the evening, dim the lights in the house and reduce or turn off screen light about one hour before bedtime.
- If your child often has trouble sleeping, talk with your child's pediatrician or seek help from a pediatric sleep specialist.

Conclusion

Many parents have questions about screen use, including:

- How long before bed should we turn off our screens?
- How much do the content, timing, and type of device matter?
- Does evening screen use affect younger children more than older children? Does it affect girls more than boys?
- Do apps that reduce screen light work?
- Do blue light-blocking glasses reduce the effects of light on sleep?

As sleep scientists work to study the answers to these important practical questions, families can benefit from reviewing and adjusting their own digital media use and sleep habits to find what works best for them.

The following content was adapted from a previous SRS Public Education Brief: [Kids, Tweens, Teens and Screens](#)

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