

Effects of Media on Sleep

To help your young child sleep better, try setting a “no-screen-time zone.” This means no electronics or lit screens one hour before bedtime.

Electronic media is all around us. TVs, computers, video games and cell phones are likely a part of daily life in your family. Recent studies by Seattle Children's researchers have shown that too much screen time, especially after dinner in the evening, can have a negative impact on a younger child's sleep. It is not clear what part of sleep is affected. It may be difficulty in falling asleep, waking up in the middle of the night, or both.

Getting a good night's sleep is essential to the growth and development of your child. Know the facts:

- Screen time includes anything with a lit screen – not only TVs but also computers, cell phones and video games, including handheld ones like a Game Boy.
- Any screen time at all one hour before bedtime can interfere with a good night's sleep. This includes even high-quality, age-appropriate and educational shows.
- Having any media devices in your child's bedroom can increase the chances they will use it and that it will interfere with their sleep. This includes TV, handheld games and cell phones.
- The parts of sleep affected by media use may be different for each child. Even if a child seems to fall asleep easily while in front of the TV, they may wake up in the middle of the night as a result of what they were watching earlier.
- Any show with violent content, even in a cartoon, can affect your child's sleep. Even the news can contain content that is frightening to young children. This is because they often cannot tell if this content is going to affect them or not. Young children are easily overwhelmed by such information and are not typically able to recognize or express their feelings.
- Even if your child does not appear to be watching a show, they may still be affected by it. If a show is being watched by an older sibling or a parent, you may think your young child is not paying attention; however, this is often not the case. This exposure can have the same impact on them as if they were actively watching it.

To Learn More

- Sleep Disorders Center
206-987-5072
- Your child's
healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask
your child's nurse.
- From outside the
hospital, call the
toll-free Family
Interpreting Line
1-866-583-1527. Tell
the interpreter the
name or extension
you need.
- For Deaf and hard of
hearing callers
206-987-2280 (TTY).

Try these tips to limit media overload in your child:

- Have a “no-screen-time zone” that starts one hour before bedtime. It should include anything with a screen that is lit. That includes not only TVs but also computers, cell phones and video games, including hand-held ones like Game Boys.
- If your child is having a hard time getting to sleep, disruption in their sleep or other sleep problems, extend this no-screen-time zone. Have their no-screen-time zone start 2 or 3 hours before bedtime or start it after dinner up through bedtime.
- Keep TVs and all electronics out of the bedroom altogether.
- Make the daytime screen time more valuable. For more information on age-appropriate media choices: CommonSenseMedia.org

Source: Media Use and Child Sleep: The Impact of Content, Timing and Environment”, Pediatrics, Michelle Garrison, June 27, 2011.