

## ***Falling Back into a Routine with Teens***

With the chill of early fall, many families have settled into the school year rhythm of early wake-ups, evening meals, and bedtimes. Still, some parents find their tweens and teens are **struggling to wake up**, **stay off screens** at night, and **focus** on schoolwork.

If your family is dealing with these challenges, here are a few tips to make your daily routines more positive and productive.

### **1. Own Your Authority and Set Simple, Firm Rules**

This first tip sounds simple, but it is foundational to maintaining a healthy family structure. As parents, you have a right to take an authoritative stance with your children. This means establishing simple rules that guide and protect them from acting on impulses.

Your structure should help them get enough sleep, eat in a healthy manner, and take care of their own responsibilities. When we expect more from children, they tend to rise to our requests, which in turn makes them feel more competent and better about themselves.

Once you decide to present rules and structure, focus on the essentials: **safety**, **health**, and **building competency**.

### **2. Identify the 'Middle Path' for Your Family**

Choosing too many rules is just as detrimental as having a lack of structure. It is not easy to find the "middle path" that works for your family, but it's worth the time to decide on these **concrete, essential areas**:

- Meals (when and where you eat)
- Sleep (bedtime and screen removal)
- Screen Use (time limits and content)
- Daily Responsibilities (academics and home chores)

### **3. Prioritize Shared Meals**

One of the most robust findings about family cohesion and strength is that eating meals together at least five nights a week (or more) makes a difference.

Parents can make this happen by meal planning in advance and keeping weeknight meals simple. To maximize connection, do not allow teens to eat in their rooms, and mandate that **no one (adults included!) is on a screen** during dinner time.

### **4. Enforce a Strict Sleep Schedule**

Teens need at least eight hours of sleep for optimal mental and physical health. You can help them achieve this by making sure all screens are removed from your teen's bedroom at least 30 minutes before a reasonable bedtime.

In our practice at Insight Counseling, much of the depression we see is related to sleep deprivation in teens. Even if depression predates sleep loss, healing absolutely requires a return to optimal sleep.

### **5. Monitor and Limit Screen Time**

Younger teens who struggle with time management really benefit from monitored screen time—even though they will push back strongly on these limits.

To enforce these limits, parents can use software like Aura, Norton, or iPhone/Android controls to manage both the time spent on devices and what apps and programs teens can access.

#### **6. Create a Homework Hub**

Parents should offer support to teens to get their homework done in a timely manner. Try having a set time for homework in a public area of the house where adults and teens are not using their phones. This often works best with younger teens, helping them internalize vital executive functioning skills.

#### **7. Anticipate and Stand Firm Against Pushback**

It's very challenging to turn family life around if limits have been loose or not enforced. However, making a few firm rules and then offering consistent support is key to good parenting.

You must anticipate anger and even temper tantrums as new limits are enforced. As long as parents stand firm, this pushback quiets relatively quickly for most teens.

If your teen continues to refuse limits, or escalates problem behaviors, first analyze if you have been truly consistent in your enforcement. If you have, talking with a therapist who specializes in adolescents can help determine if your child may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

**Stay firm, loving, and consistent to help your child find a healthy routine and thrive.**