

It's well established that sleep is vital for children and adolescents' learning, physical health, mental wellbeing, and emotional regulation. Yet, a concerning number of Australian children and adolescents aren't meeting the national sleep guidelines according to a recent study*.

There are many reasons for young people's poor sleep habits including school demands, co-curricular and/or work commitments, perceived pressure from parents and educators and consumption of energy drinks. Young people's digital device habits can have a significant, negative impact on their sleep.

Handheld devices emit blue light which hampers melatonin production. This can result in the delayed onset of sleep and potentially shorten critical phases of the sleep cycle. Research confirms that children who have not yet gone through puberty are particularly vulnerable to blue light exposure in the evening as they have larger pupils, compared to post-puberty adolescents.

Strategies to stop screens from sabotaging your child's sleep

Parents can have a positive influence on their child and teens' digital habits and doing so will yield positive results for their child's sleep and subsequent learning and wellbeing.

Establish a digital bedtime

Kids should switch off digital devices 60 minutes prior to falling asleep. Reinforce this habit by establishing a 'landing zone' such as a kitchen bench, or desk in a study or sideboard where digital devices go for charging and storage. Many students report that they 'need' to complete homework or submit assignments late at night. Verify the validity of such statements and work in partnership with your child's school to limit this type of required screen activity at night. Parents need to also be good role models by switching off before bed too.

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