

Survey says parents don't know how much sleep kids need

2004-03-31

by [Nora Doyle](#)

King County Journal Reporter

A new survey shows that children are not getting enough sleep and that parents might not be aware of how much sleep their children actually need.

According to a survey by the National Sleep Foundation, sleep deprivation is a problem that starts with infants, who need 14 to 15 hours of sleep every 24 hours. The parents surveyed said their infants sleep an average of 12.7 hours a day.

Sleep experts recommend that school-age children get 10 to 11 hours of sleep every night, but survey results show they only get about 9.5 hours of sleep.

Jann Longman, a psychology teacher at Liberty High School in the Issaquah School District, said inadequate sleep is a huge problem in the classroom.

"I've got lots of kids who have trouble staying awake in class," Longman said. "It's not that they're being lazy. They're just not getting enough sleep."

Tired students lack focus, enthusiasm and interest in class subjects, she said.

A survey Longman conducted using about 100 of her students this year showed that almost 66 percent of them had large sleep deficiencies causing either errors in class work or diminished quality of life, meaning that they were less interested in things they formerly found fascinating and were less inclined to socialize.

About 17 percent of the students reported getting adequate sleep every day or most days.

While the National Sleep Foundation, an independent, nonprofit organization, found that television in the bedroom and caffeine disrupt the sleep of older children, those may not be the only factors that keep children from getting enough sleep.

William Park, a doctor at Valley Medical Center's Sleep Center in Renton, said one of the primary reasons children don't get enough sleep is that their

parents don't recognize how many hours children need to sleep in order to be completely rested. He added that sleep is not always a priority for today's busy families.

`` People clearly do undervalue good sleep, and it's one of the easiest things to ignore," Park said.

Another problem is that as children age, people assume they need less sleep, Park said. In fact, they need more. That's particularly true of adolescents who are still growing physically, mentally and emotionally. Without enough sleep, adolescents will suffer from attention-span problems and a lack of focus, he said.

Busy schedules also can be part of the problem, said Laurie Dooley, a counselor at Auburn Riverside High School where she sees many students juggling demanding academic studies with extracurricular activities and part-time jobs.

`` They go from morning 'til night," she said.

Other sleep foundation survey findings show that:

- * More than two-thirds of all children experience one or more sleep problems at least a few nights a week.
- * Nearly one-third of children 10 and younger wake up at least once a night needing attention, including 14 percent of school-aged children.
- * About 26 percent of children between the ages of 3 and 10 drink at least one caffeinated beverage a day. Those children sleep about 3.5 hours a week less than those who don't drink caffeine.
- * More than 40 percent of school-aged children have a television in their bedroom; those children sleep about two hours a week less than children who don't have a TV in the bedroom.
- * More than half of those polled said their child's doctor did not ask about their child's sleep; the older the child, the less likely such a discussion, although older children are more likely to experience frequent sleep problems.

Nora Doyle covers education. She can be reached at nora.doyle@kingcountyjournal.com or 253-872-6726.

GETTING KIDS THEIR SLEEP

The National Sleep Foundation makes the following recommendations for parents to help children get enough sleep: * Decide how much sleep each family member needs and take steps to ensure they get it. * Have regular bedtime routines, create a quiet and comfortable bedroom, and keep consistent bedtime and wake-up times. * Keep televisions or computers out of the bedroom. Eliminate caffeine from children's diets. * Learn to recognize sleep problems, including difficulty falling asleep, nighttime awakenings, snoring, stalling and resisting going to bed. * Talk to your child's doctor about sleep.