

CORNERSTONE  
DAY SCHOOL

# Parents Matter

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## Importance of Sleep

Sleep is something that all of us need and yet few of us get enough of. Sleep is necessary to recharge our bodies, boost our immune system, and enhance our learning and memory. It also contributes to our overall emotional health (Harvard Health Publications, 2009). Many of us have experienced trying to function on very little sleep and understand how difficult it can be to get through the day. Lack of sleep can impair our thinking, judgment, ability to regulate our emotions and ability to perform optimally.

Sleep is particularly important for students in order to achieve optimal functioning at school. According to the APA, 69 percent of children experience one or more sleep problems a few nights or more during the week (APA, 2005). Addressing sleep difficulties is especially important when a child has mental health issues, as there is a strong association between sleep disturbance and those diagnosed with mental health disorders. Chronic sleep problems affect 50% to 80% of patients in a typical psychiatric practice, compared with 10% to 18% in the general population (Harvard Health Publications, 2009). Therefore, addressing an individual's sleep habits is an integral component of optimal treatment.

Frequently, those diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses manifest sleep disturbance, including insomnia and hypersomnia. Lack of adequate sleep can enhance psychiatric symptoms, such as irritability, impulsivity and the capacity to regulate emotions. There is some research that shows a correlation between the effect of sleepiness and its impact on decision making and risk taking (APA, 2005). The research found that lack of sleep negatively impacted an individual's ability to effectively make decisions and could lead to increased risk taking behaviors (APA, 2005). Additionally, some studies suggest sleep problems may directly contribute toward the development of a psychiatric illness (Harvard Health Publications, 2009). This highlights the importance of implementing healthy sleep habits for our children, as healthy sleep may be able to stave off the development of mental health issues.

At Cornerstone Day School, students frequently report sleep disturbance. This lack of sleep interferes with their ability to complete their school work and effectively handle interpersonal issues. Clinicians address sleep difficulties and encourage students to improve their sleep patterns.

Here are some strategies to help your child improve sleep hygiene:

- Emphasize the importance of sleep and ways in which your child can implement healthy sleep patterns.

- Assist your child with establishing a bedtime routine that is conducive to sleeping. Maintain a regular sleep/wake schedule. This means even maintaining this schedule on weekends, since getting off the schedule makes it very challenging to adjust back to their during the week. If your child sleeps in until noon on Sunday, it will be very difficult to go to sleep at a time that is conducive to getting up Monday morning.
- Encourage your child to avoid stimulating activities while trying to go to sleep, such as watching television, being on social media and playing video games.
- Encourage him/her to exercise regularly during the day and avoid exercising right before bedtime.
- Encourage your child to sleep in a dark room, as this is more conducive to sleeping. Darkness promotes sleep and healthy levels of melatonin (APA, 2005).
- Assist your child in identifying several activities that are calming prior to bed, such as taking a warm bath, listening to soothing music or doing a relaxation exercise.
- Encourage your child to avoid caffeine and sugar prior to bedtime, as these can inhibit sleep.
- Talk with your Cornerstone therapist and psychiatrist if the above strategies do not seem to be effective with implementing sleep hygiene.

### References:

APA. (Feb 2005). *Why Sleep is Important and what happens when you don't get enough.* <http://www.apa.org/topics/sleep/why.aspx>

*What's the connection between sleep and mental health? A Q&A with circadian neuroscientist Russell Foster.* <http://blog.ted.com/2013/08/14/the-connection-between-sleep-and-mental-health-a-qa-with-circadian-neuroscientist-russell-foster/> (July 2009) *Sleep and mental health.* Harvard Health Publications. [http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Letter/2009/July/Sleep-and-mental-health](http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2009/July/Sleep-and-mental-health)



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*Parents Matter is published regularly throughout the school year as a service to the parents of students enrolled at Cornerstone Day School. Each issue highlights an important topic for parents with practical suggestions for helping their child continue to grow and overcome their emotional challenges.*