

Sleep Deprivation

By Samantha West

Following a documentary, **You're Not Alone**, a panel of professionals discussed a pertinent issue of Teens: **Sleep Deprivation**.

If a teen is dozing off during his or her first class of the day, it doesn't necessarily mean they're lazy. Teen brains are biologically programmed to sleep later and longer. But because of early school start times and because of busy schedules that often come with high school, they're not getting the sleep they need.

“Sleep is hugely important for mental health and very, very important for teens,” said Wendy Magas, project coordinator of Healthy Teen Minds, an initiative of the N.E.W. Mental Health Connection. “If there was one single thing we could do that would have the biggest impact on an entire population - specifically improving the mental health of our kids - it would be improving their sleep.” One way parents can be proactive in improving youth mental health is monitoring their sleep pattern. It is important that teens get enough sleep. Because of the changes in the brain as teens move from puberty to adolescence, teens need more sleep than adults and they may need to sleep later.

Most teens aren't getting enough sleep which is indicated in a 2016 study published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It showed more than two-thirds of high school students aren't getting enough sleep on school nights.

There are major health consequences that follow. A 2016 study published by the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine found that getting less than the recommended 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night as a teenager is associated with increased risk for self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

Data from the 2015-2016 Youth Risk Behavioral Studies, which surveyed more than 9,000 students across several Wisconsin counties show that teenagers who got five or fewer hours of sleep had the highest rate of depression, while those who got eight or more hours were least likely to be depressed.

Depression is not the only health risk associated for teens not getting enough rest. Inadequate sleep impacts everything - it affects their academic performance, causes more sports injuries and more fatal car crashes. Mental health aside, there are so many other negative health consequences.

How do we fix that? Though schools should consider later start times as a systemic change, it is important for parents to model healthy sleep habits for their kids. “I know that we’re always connected 24/7 – we’re always checking our work email, we’re sitting in bed with our laptops and phones,” Magas said. “But if we can just model good sleep hygiene where your bedroom is a sanctuary for sleep, it’s quiet and without distractions ... that’s going to be so good for their health.

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