



FAMOUS PEOPLE AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH



Lizzo

The performance artist is open on social media about her own struggles.

The Connection Between Sleep and Mental Health

Not getting enough shuteye can have a larger impact on your kids than you might realize. Here's how and what you can do to help them rest easier. *By Stacey Winconeck*

People of all ages are still struggling to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, says Jillian Schneider, Licensed Professional Counselor and Owner of Lifecare & Recovery in Troy. As a result, she's witnessed an increase in anxiety and depression — and a decrease in sleep as those people turn to their screens to cope with their feelings.

While children ages 6-12 should be getting 9-12 hours of sleep per night and teens should sleep 8-10 hours each night, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, many are staying up late on social media, texting, scrolling or watching TV.

Lack of sleep, however, is a major problem that can lead to some serious mental health issues. In fact, sleep loss can actually trigger mood episodes related to bipolar disorder, a disease that impacts 2.3 million Americans, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

"If you're not sleeping, you're not functioning right," Schneider says. Your brain doesn't function the same way and you could develop symptoms you are not familiar with. In the young adult years (around 18-20), in particular, mood changes can occur because of the lack of sleep. Bipolar disorder would come on sooner if they aren't taking care of themselves, she adds.

Lack of sleep also impacts school performance as it reduces a child's cognitive abilities. Sleep-deprived kids struggle to

concentrate, remember and solve problems in the classroom — which leads to a drop in grades and overall academic performance.

So, how can parents ensure their kids are getting a good night's sleep? Read on for Schneider's advice to help kids stay focused and mentally healthy this school year.

Powering down

It takes about an hour to wind down for bed, so that's why a bedtime routine is essential.

"I think routine is probably the most important thing for most people, especially with children," Schneider says. Children are growing and developing, but their brains are also processing what happened in school and during the day, and sleep is essential for all of these processes to occur.

"I think that especially for children, they need to be sleeping 8 hours a day to be able to fully function in school," she says. "If you're not getting that full amount of sleep, I think that's where they start to have issues or troubles in school."

That bedtime routine should not include a screen, Schneider says. Turn off phones, video games or other electronics.

Video games, especially, can evoke emotional responses in addition to brain stimulus — and the combination isn't conducive to restful sleep for your child. "How is that child expected to go to bed after you just stimulated them with a

game?" she says.

Make sure you have a calming bedtime routine. Taking a bath, putting on pajamas, and reading books before bed are ideal for kids.

Being more physically active, whether it's participating in school sports or exercising, can aid sleep, as well.

Be consistent, too. Set a specific bedtime and stick to it every night. "When you give a little inch or you say you can watch one more show, that's when they know they can push a little bit harder," she says.

For kids who struggle with anxiety, Schneider suggests using the five senses to put your child at ease. Ask the following questions: What music do they like to listen to? What is their favorite snack? What is something they like to look at? Do they feel calm when they touch something soft? Incorporate these feel-good sensory activities as good coping techniques when they feel anxious or depressed. It could be something as simple as a soft blanket or snuggles with your dog or cat.

All parents and caregivers should be on the same page when it comes to their child's sleep, Schneider adds, so it makes sense to have conversations about bedtimes and make sure everyone is on board. Start from the perspective that children need sleep to grow and be physically and mentally healthy and let that guide your decisions about appropriate bedtimes and bedtime routines.

SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH

As adults, we may caffeinate to cope with tiredness. We spend day after day running on empty — and thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing an increase in anxiety and depression, which further impacts our sleep.

It's the same for our kids. As they embark on a new school year, it's imperative that they get enough rest each night (anywhere from 8-12 hours depending on age) to be able to function in the classroom. Furthermore, getting enough sleep each night helps keep children mentally healthy. Sleep is essential, and to ensure your children are getting enough sleep each night, read this advice from a local expert and develop your own consistent sleep routines for your family. We hope you'll share this installment of *Opening Minds, Ending Stigma* with your friends and family.



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