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# Kids Asleep, But Still Texting

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Well here's a decidedly 21<sup>st</sup> century sleep issue. Apparently there's a rising phenomenon among teens: sleep texting. That's right, teens are reaching for their phones during the night, firing off messages, and waking with no recollection of their actions.

We're all aware of how deeply embedded social media and technology are in our culture today. This is especially true for young people. One study suggests that teens send an average of 100 texts per day! Texting while sleeping is a sign of just how deeply rooted these habits are for teens. Before you chuckle this one off: **the intrusion of technology into sleep is a real issue in our modern age, one with serious health consequences, especially among teenagers.**

First, let's talk about adolescents and sleep. Teens have their own set of sleep needs—and challenges—that are distinct from adults.

- **They need more sleep:** Teens generally need at least nine hours of sleep per night. Unfortunately, most of them don't get it.
- **Their sleep is more likely to be disrupted:** Biological changes associated with puberty make it harder for teens to fall asleep and stay asleep. Their lifestyles—increasing academic and social pressure, late nights up and sleep-in Saturday mornings, also can make it harder for teenagers to fall asleep on a regular schedule.
- **Their internal clocks are different:** Those biological changes that come with puberty also shift adolescents' natural inclinations to stay up late and to sleep late. Their school schedules are at odds with this biological tendency, which leaves teens at risk for sleep deprivation.

Lack of sleep, and the failure to establish healthy sleep habits, can have serious consequences for teenagers. Sleep deprivation poses a threat to their academic success, and also to their physical and mental health. Sleep problems among teens are linked to:

- Obesity
- High-blood pressure
- Depression, behavioral problems, and drug abuse

Teens are not just at risk for short-term health problems. There is evidence that sleep problems during the teenage years can affect overall health well into adulthood.

Social media is still relatively new in our culture, but there is already evidence that it interferes with teens' sleep habits. A large-scale study by the Kaiser Family Foundation painted a stark

picture of overall electronic media use by adolescents. They found that teens spent 53 hours per week engaged with some form of electronic media. That's more than 7 hours per day. And this figure doesn't even include the daily 90 minutes of texting researchers attributed, on average, to teens! They also found that teens' daily consumption of social media was on the rise, with mobile media increasing at the fastest rate.

- Another study indicates that teens who text and use the internet are more likely to have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, and have more difficult mood swings during the day
- Research shows that social networks actually help to influence sleep habits among "friends" in shared and overlapping networks. They also found similar influence toward drug use with teens who share extended social networks.

Let's not forget that texting during sleep is not only going to be disruptive to the teen who is texting, but also to the teen who is receiving a message—and a beeping cell phone—in the middle of the night.

We can't ignore electronic and social media, or pretend it's not an important part of life for all of us, teens included. As parents, we can work with our teenagers to set reasonable boundaries. Here are some ways to help your teen keep from overdoing it with technology:

**Set limits.** Let's face it, self-discipline and time management when it comes to technology are hard enough for adults, much less teenagers. It's up to us as parents to establish boundaries. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that only 3 in 10 teens have rules at home about electronic media use. They also found that rules *do* help decrease teens' overall tech time.

**Get them outside.** Whether its participation in organized sports, or regular family hikes, getting teens involved in physical activity outdoors has a range of benefits, including time away from their lives online. Exposure to sunlight, and regular exercise, will also help their sleep.

**Keep the bedroom tech free.** This one's a no brainer. The easiest way to keep technology from interfering with your teenager's nightly sleep is to keep cell phones, computers, and electronic devices out of the bedroom altogether. I know, they probably won't like it—but they will sleep better.

Parents, its up to us to take the lead in establishing both good sleep habits and healthy limits for technology for our teens. These are skills that will serve them long after they've left adolescence.

Sweet Dreams,

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