

# Sleep

by Susanne Keeley

“I made that mistake because I was too well rested,” said nobody, ever! The value of a well-rested brain can’t be understated. While many brain functions are reduced with inadequate sleep, executive functions are particularly vulnerable. Because these are very high level skills, they need optimal conditions to function optimally, with sleep being high on the list of needs. In the last decade, I have seen a steady rise in the number of clients I see that I would describe as sleep deprived.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children 6-12 years old should sleep 9-12 hours and 13-18 year olds, 8-10 hours during a 24 hour period. This is on a regular basis and does not imply that 15 hours of sleep on Sundays will make up for missed time. Further, a study presented at the AAP 2019 National Conference showed that only 48% of United States school aged children sleep 9 hours most weekdays. Less than half!

So what is keeping students from consistently sleeping enough? I most often see the culprit being overscheduling. Many students participate in multiple, high frequency activities causing them to not return home until 8:00pm making time for homework and some relaxation before bedtime difficult, if not impossible. Additionally, most students do and should participate in some after school activities. Teachers need to be cognizant of the actual time available to students and work to insure that homework doesn’t exceed a reasonable amount of this time. Another offender involves screen time. Every family needs to establish their own rules regarding screens relative to each particular child’s strengths and weaknesses. But rules do need to be established for the quantity and quality of screen time each day. The AAP suggests that all screens be turned off 30 minutes before bedtime and that TV, computers and other screens not be allowed in children’s bedrooms.

Parental modeling is key. When children see their parents consistently over-scheduling themselves or over-scheduling the family, they will view this as normal. When children witness their parents frequently on screens to the exclusion of other activities, they will view this as normal. When children observe their parents staying up late and being tired, they will view this as normal.

The cycle is vicious. You don't sleep enough and your executive function skills decline. Your executive function skills decline and with it your efficiency declines so the tasks take you longer. The tasks take longer, so you stay up later. And so it continues.

As the adults in the room, parents and teachers need to be realistic. There are only so many hours in a day. Try to be reasonable about what can be accomplished and be the catalyst for change.

“Sounding the Alarm on the Importance of Sleep: The Positive Impact of Sufficient Sleep on Childhood Flourishing” <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Only-Half-of-U-S-Children-Get-Enough-Sleep-During-the-Week.aspx>

Susanne Phillips Keeley, MA CCC-SLP earned undergraduate degrees in Communication Disorders & Speech Science and in Psychology from the University of Colorado and received her Masters Degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Northwestern University. Susanne is a licensed speech-language pathologist with over 30 years of experience successfully treating those with executive function disorders and differences. She is the author of “Write This Down: Making Your Student Planner Work For You” (www.lulu.com), “The Source for Executive Function Disorders” (www.proedinc.com) and developed GOSTRONG, a unique tool to maximize executive function skills. Susanne's innovative work has led her to be a frequent speaker at conferences, schools and parent groups across the country. Her private practice is located in Wilmette, Illinois.