

Cognitive behavior therapy could be key for children with autism getting enough sleep

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Cognitive behavioral therapy is a short-term form of therapy that focuses on changing how a person thinks about and reacts to specific situations. Used by therapists for decades, it has been proven effective for treating a number of problems including insomnia. During the therapy, patients usually keep a sleep diary and work with a therapist to identify behaviors that are interfering with sleep. Experts from the University of Missouri believe that a family-based cognitive behavioral therapy may be the key for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who have problems sleeping.

"Sleep problems for any child, but especially children with ASD, may cause issues in behavior and mood as well as impact learning abilities," said Christina McCrae, professor of health psychology in the School of Health Professions and director of the Mizzou Sleep Research Lab. "In treating insomnia and other behavioral sleep issues, I have found that there is no substitute for [cognitive behavioral therapy](#); yet, it is still unclear how to best use such therapy for children with ASD who struggle with communication."

To better understand the benefits of a new, family-based cognitive behavioral therapy and how it may work to improve sleep in children with ASD, McCrae and Micah Mazurek, associate professor of [health psychology](#), are conducting a sleep treatment study through the Research Core at the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders. Eligible participants must be between the ages of six and 12, been diagnosed with [autism spectrum disorder](#) and have experienced

problems falling or staying asleep. For more information on the study please contact the Thompson Center Research Core at 573-884-6838 or MuckermanJu@health.missouri.edu.

McCrae suggest that if parents are noticing that their children with ASD are having problems—at home or in school—it may be helpful to check their sleeping habits. She also suggests that parents and health professionals should routinely screen for [sleep problems](#) as addressing them early may curb additional problems.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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