

Enforcing a weekday bedtime could help your child get sufficient sleep

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Enforcing rules about bedtimes could help your child get the sleep they need on weekdays, according to new research published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*.

The study, conducted by researchers at Public Health Ontario, Canada, found that when parents actively enforce a bedtime during the week,

their children were more likely to meet established sleep guidelines. Neither encouraging nor enforcing a bedtime had an effect on sleep at the weekend.

Dr Heather Manson, senior author and Chief, Health Promotion, Chronic Disease and Injury prevention at Public Health Ontario, said: "We found that "encouragement" as a parental support was less effective for both weekend and weekday sleep. Enforcement of rules around bedtimes had a significant impact, but only on weekdays. We can conclude that parents enforcing a bedtime on the weekday could help support their [child](#) to achieve sufficient sleep."

The study used self-reported data from over 1,600 parents with at least one child under the age of 18 years from Ontario. Depending on the age of the child, the proportion of parents reporting that their child met the Canadian sleep guidelines ranged from 68.3-92.6% for weekdays and 49.3-86.0% for weekends. The number of children meeting the guidelines increased between ages 5 and 9 years but declined between 10 and 17 years. Children aged 15 years old showed the greatest difference between weekday and weekend sleep, with 38.3% fewer children meeting guidelines on the weekends compared to the weekdays.

Dr Manson explained: "Sleep is increasingly being recognized as an important determinant of health, and an integral component of healthy living for children, integrated with other behaviours such as physical activity and sedentary time. In the family context, parents' support behaviours towards sleep could play an important role in their child's health. We wanted to understand how different types of parent behaviours impacted their child's sleep".

Around 94% of parents reported encouraging their child to go to bed at a specific time, and just over 84% reported enforcing bedtime rules. This suggests that parents are aware of and support the benefits of a good

night's sleep, according to the researchers. Parents who reported enforcing [bedtime](#) rules were 59% more likely to have their child meeting sleep guidelines on a weekday. This takes into account age and sex of the child, parental education, household income, and other support behaviours such as limiting screens in the bedroom.

In general, neither rules nor encouragement to limit screen time in the bedroom were reported to have an effect on children's sleep. Dr Manson commented: "This is particularly surprising in light of the evidence showing screens in the bedroom can negatively affect children's sleep."

This study involves self-reported survey data which is limited by relying on the parent's memory to recall answers for survey questions, as well as relying on the [parents](#) to answer honestly. The authors also note that the survey did not include any direct measures of [sleep duration](#) or sleep quality which is an important component of 'healthy' [sleep](#).

More information: Evelyn Pyper et al, Do parents' support behaviours predict whether or not their children get sufficient sleep? A cross-sectional study, *BMC Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-017-4334-4](#)

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