

Five Reasons Kids Shouldn't Sleep Near Their Devices

Five research-backed reasons you might not want to let your kids sleep near their cell phones:

1. Kids may take longer to fall asleep if they use their phones right before bed.

A 2015 study of nearly 10,000 teens, ages 16-19, found that those who used their phones an hour before bedtime had a harder time falling asleep. They were 13-52 percent more likely to take more than 60 minutes to fall asleep. Doctors say that it should normally only take people 15 to 20 minutes.

2. They'll be more likely to lose out on hours of sleep time.

Adolescents who used their phones an hour before bedtime were between 35 and 53 percent more likely to miss two or more hours of sleep a night compared to peers who didn't. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that school-aged children get 10 hours of sleep a night. The risks associated with losing multiple hours of sleep according to the National Sleep Foundation include behavior problems, impaired learning and school performance, emotional issues and obesity.

3. Sleeping near cell phones is considered worse for kids than sleeping in front of the TV. (Yes, really.)

A study that looked at 2,048 fourth- and seventh graders found that those who slept near their small devices reported 20.6 fewer minutes of sleep, which was also associated with insufficient rest or sleep. Children who slept in front of the TV lost 18 minutes of sleep — a close call, but it seems cell phones are the bigger culprits.

4. Plus, keeping phones in the bedroom encourages kids to stay awake and text into the night.

Keeping cell phones within reach — on a nightstand or a dresser next to the bed — can keep kids awake for up to four hours, according to a 2010 study. The students surveyed, ages 8-22, sent an average of 34 texts and emails a night *after* going to bed. The researchers found that about half of the kids who texted at night also suffered from ADHD, anxiety, depression, mood and cognitive problems and trouble learning.

5. Even if they're using their devices to read — and not to socialize — the glow of a tablet or phone can disrupt sleep.

A 2014 study found that those who read on screens before bed released less melatonin, the hormone that helps us sleep, compared to those who read from a printed book. These people weren't able to reach rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep for as long throughout the night and took longer to fall asleep. Kindles, eReaders, iPads and smartphone reading apps may be a convenient way to get kids reading, but they can come at a cost.

So what can you do?

Kids may not be thrilled to be separated from their devices, but there are things you can do if you're worried about their quality of sleep. Some tips for reducing screen time during nighttime hours:

1. Put phones away two hours before bedtime.
2. Instead of relying on cell phones to wake them up in the morning, put an alarm clock on their nightstand.
3. Stock up on print books that will get your kid excited about reading at night.
4. Charge cell phones outside of bedrooms so they're not within reach when notifications come through.

Contact your cell phone provider to find out which services they offer that set limits on your child's cell phone during the school day and at night.