

# Parent

pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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## Getting your ABZZZZZZs

**O**ur children are growing up in a busy world. School, sports, dance, religious instruction, youth group activities, fund raising, tutoring, and technology all crowd the short hours of the day.

Children are busy because of parent schedules, too. As a teacher, I take advantage of the amount of time my students spend in the car with parents. I encourage reading and math practice with activities that work in the back seat. Work schedules often mean supper is late in the evening. For some families, the evening hours are the only hours they spend together. Family time competes with sleeping time.

### Make up for loss of naps

Parents understand that infants and toddlers need sleep, but when children reach school age and no longer nap during the day, it is easy to forget the importance of a good night's sleep for growth and learning. According to research from the National Sleep Foundation, children ages 5 to 12 require at least 10 hours of sleep a night. Teenagers are not far behind with a need of at least nine hours of sleep. This means that if your sixth-grader needs to be awake by 7 a.m., he should be asleep by 9 p.m. to get the minimum sleep necessary for a productive day.

Inadequate amounts of sleep have

detrimental effects. Children learn less, not only because they are sleepy during class, but because their brains do not have adequate time to process the day's learning while they are asleep. Elementary age children need 10 hours of sleep every night, not just during achievement test week. Children who do not get adequate amounts of sleep can demonstrate many of the same characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

An adequate amount of sleep allows children to physically grow and improve stamina. A good night's sleep will not only help your student learn multiplication tables, but it will give him or her an edge on the basketball court, too. It is amazing how we are willing to spend money on tutors, medications, and sports lessons while we ignore the simple fact that children require adequate sleep in order to work, play, and learn at their peak.



### The Savior even slept

Jesus slept. Even when He was busy, He took time to sleep. When a storm threatened to drown their boat, the disciples found Jesus sleeping (Matt. 8:23-25). Jesus certainly did not find drowning to be unimportant, but He did find rest to be essential.

The standards of our world want us to believe that sleep is for the unproductive. We are made to feel weak or lazy for wanting a full night's sleep. But God, who needs no rest, took a day of rest when He created the world to

show us the importance of recuperating. We need to sleep, and we need to teach our children to sleep, so that we are good stewards of time and talent. Sleep is a gift from God, and a blessing to our growth in His love and care. "... For he grants sleep

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to those he loves” (Ps. 127:2).

From the 18-month-old who protests “I not sweepy, Mommy,” to the teenager whose body clock makes falling asleep before midnight a challenge, our children resist the urge to sleep. Sleep is seen as law, a punishment, or an activity that causes us to miss a television show. It is viewed as the end of fun instead of the preparation for a new day. But sleep is grace. Psalm 3:5 says, “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.” Sleep is essential to our life and health.

## Sleep is a blessing

Teaching our children that sleep is a blessing is the first step toward the goal of adequate sleep. To do that, we must model sleep as a blessing, but as Hamlet might say, “aye there’s the rub.” We may need to change our sleep habits in order to model good sleep habits as well as expect them from our children. This is not easy, but God blesses our efforts. Show your children, in word and action, that you value sleep as an important part of the day.

To encourage good sleep for your children, watch for anything that might work

against sleep. Hunt for hidden caffeine in your child’s diet. Carbonated beverages, some energy drinks, and chocolate can be unwanted sources of caffeine. Teach your child how to read labels. If you eliminate caffeine from your child’s diet, you will understand better how it affects your child’s behavior as well as his or her ability to fall asleep.

**God blesses us through sleep by restoring our brains and bodies to better enable us to love and serve Him. Sleep is not a minor blessing.**

Make sure your child’s bedroom is a place of rest. Toys as well as technology should be stored away. A television in the bedroom is a great hindrance to sleep. The last hour before bedtime should be a time for story telling and reading or discussing the events of the day. This is a time for behavior that calms rather than stimulates. Help children to wind down at bedtime. Many children who seem to be full of

energy toward the end of the day are actually tired. Their brains stimulate physical activity in order to stay awake. Some children need to be taught to recognize this behavior and taught ways to calm themselves. The end of the day should be a quiet time, with a familiar routine that comforts children as they relax their bodies for a night’s rest. Family devotions and prayer make an excellent way to tie up the loose ends of a busy day.

Morning routines are also important to good sleep. Just as we create a winding down time at night, we should encourage a morning routine that rouses the brain and body. Turning on the lights is a good way to signal to the brain that the day has begun. Get up early enough to develop a healthy family routine. This is a great time of the day to practice music or review homework. Getting up earlier will also make bedtime easier as you shift your child’s clock to a healthier schedule.

God blesses us through sleep by restoring our brains and bodies to better enable us to love and serve Him. Sleep is not a minor blessing. It is a gift that enables our children to grow and learn and to feel safe in their Savior’s love.

## Questions for discussion

1. What are the negative connotations of sleep? Are we impressed by people who seem to get by with little sleep?
2. How do you benefit from a good night’s sleep? What are the consequences of too little sleep?
3. What behaviors demonstrated by your child might indicate the need for more sleep?

### For further study:

- [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)

Kim Marxhausen, Lincoln, Neb., Writer • Frank Kohn, Editor and Layout

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