



GISW Counseling

We have heard from some parents that their kids are having trouble falling asleep or that their sleep patterns have vastly changed. This can be due to anxiety about the current situation, the changes in routine, or simply not getting the same amount of physical play and exertion that they get during normal school days. When sleep is insufficient, academic functioning can be impacted and kids can be more irritable. Below are some tips that we combined from various reputable resources:

Create a schedule that the family takes seriously.

Have a family discussion about the schedule and get some level of input and buy-in from your kids so they are more likely to commit to it (e.g., let them pick two break times and lunchtime). Set a **consistent** wake time, bedtime, work time, meal times, and wind-down time for the family on weekdays and on weekends. Establishing a routine can facilitate a sense of normalcy even in abnormal times. Of course, you can allow for occasional exceptions. For guidance you can follow the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) guidelines](#) to make sure your kids are getting the adequate amount of sleep for their age.

If your child is making lots of “callbacks” (calling you back to their room for “just one more thing”) and “curtain calls” (trips out of their room to find you), try making **bedtime tickets**: small cards good for one or two more callbacks or curtain calls. Bedtime tickets are a great way to set limits at bedtime in a way that still lets kids feel like they have some control.

Keep naptime consistent

Just because there is nowhere you “need” to be, that doesn’t mean you should upset the naptime schedule that you worked so hard to set in place. No matter the age, a regular naptime supports a successful bedtime. While generally naps are not encouraged when children are older (past preschool age), allow some flexibility for naps as long as the child’s nighttime behaviors are not disruptive to the household. If there are multiple, long wake-ups in the middle of the night, naps should be minimized or discontinued.

Give reassurances and talk through problems during the day

A lack of predictability during the current circumstances can feel unsettling for children and increase risk for anxiety and worry. Without their usual coping strategies accessible (e.g., sports, friends, hobbies, etc.) the impact of anxiety on children can be challenging.

One suggestion: find time during the day for support and talking through problems. Your child will be alert enough to listen to your reassurances and experience the security of your attachment and connection. If your child tends to want to talk about their concerns with you at night, try a “**worry jar**” (Mrs. Schweitzer will give more instructions to the ES kids on this in her “Weekend Wind Down”!) and “**worry time**,” (a half-hour block of time set aside each day to explore worries) and use these techniques in the daytime.

Worry jars and worry time can help keep kids from spending too much time each day focusing on their fears and to give them the power of the knowledge that there is a place in- or time during which they can deposit them. It can help keep your child’s bed and bedroom associated only with positive things. You will, of course, want to offer time to talk about your child’s concerns, but it’s not a good idea to do this at bedtime in their beds. You don’t want to associate anxious thoughts and difficult conversations with the place where your child relaxes and sleeps. Try to have these talks well before bedtime and in another room, if possible.

Also, adding comfort items like a security blanket, soft night light, “lovey” or stuffed animal, or rearranging the child’s bedroom to make it feel more fresh, welcoming and free of negative associations, might be strategies to make children feel more secure.

See the Light

Exposure to light plays a crucial role in helping our bodies regulate sleep in a healthy way. As you deal with disruptions to daily life, you may need to take steps so that light-based cues have a positive effect on your circadian rhythm.

- If you can, spend some time outside in **natural light**. Even if the sun isn’t shining brightly, natural light still has positive effects on circadian rhythm.
- As much as possible, open windows and blinds to let light into your home during the day.
- Be mindful of screen time. The blue light produced by electronic devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers, has been found to interfere with the body’s natural sleep-promoting processes. As much as possible, avoid using these devices for an hour before bed.

Stay Active

It’s easy to overlook exercise with everything happening in the world, but regular daily activity has numerous important benefits, including for sleep. If you can go for a walk while maintaining a safe distance from other people, that’s a great option. If not, there is a wealth of kid-friendly resources online.

Utilize Relaxation Techniques

Finding ways to relax can be a potent tool in improving your sleep. Deep breathing, stretching, yoga, mindfulness or guided meditation, calming music, and quiet reading are just a few examples of relaxation techniques that you can build into your routines, especially before bedtime.

If you have any questions, please contact us by email:

Klara Fabina – counselor@giswashington.org

Ulrike Schweitzer – uschweitzer@giswashington.org