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Ensure children sleep: ban mobiles, say teachers

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Teachers are warning parents to ensure their children get enough sleep to do well at school, as experts fear late-night use of mobiles and computers are interfering with results.

Following a study suggesting Australian year 4 students were the fifth most sleep-deprived of the 50 countries examined, the Australian Education Union is calling on parents to be more vigilant in ensuring kids do not miss out on much-needed rest.

The union's federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said students who missed out on adequate sleep found it harder to learn and fully participate in school.

"There is clearly anecdotal evidence that suggests children are spending more and more time on computers, engaged in a lot more screen-time activities and that this may also be impacting on their sleep behaviours as well," he said.

"Parents must be mindful of their children's behaviours and need to take appropriate action and care to ensure their children are sleeping well."

The latest TIMSS International Results in Mathematics suggest about 67 per cent of Australian year 4 maths students were in classrooms where the teachers reported instruction was hampered by some students suffering lack of sleep. Only four of the 50 countries had a higher level of sleep deprivation in the study, led by the US with 73 per cent.

Paediatric sleep specialist Chris Seton, of Westmead Children's Hospital, said it fell to educators to ensure the homework burden on students was not too high. Dr Seton said before-school extra-curricular activities also added pressure, but the use of electronic media before sleep was the No.1 factor he would like to change.



Deprived: Australia ranked fifth out of 50 for tired students.

BEDTIME TIPS





- ▶ Discourage use of electronic media in the hour before bed.
- ▶ Remove mobile phones from the bedroom overnight, if possible.
- ▶ Encourage relaxing pre-bed habits such as reading or a bath.

Source: Westmead Children's Hospital sleep specialist Chris Seton

Bedtime tips: Encouraging better sleep.

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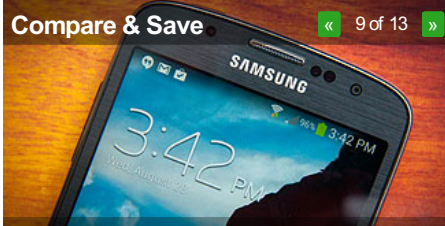


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to change.

"There's a strong correlation between electronic media usage in the particular country and where they figure in the survey," he said. "It doesn't matter how good the education is; if kids are tired, the learning is futile."

Dr Seton said every child differed but nine- or 10-year-old needed an average of between 10.5 and 11 hours of sleep, while 12- to 18-year-olds needed an average of nearly 9.5 hours. He said teenagers generally stayed up later as they got older but their sleep needs did not change, resulting in tiredness.

"With young people you can deprive them of 20 minutes of sleep and detect an IQ difference; they're so sensitive to sleep loss."

Dr Seton advised parents to ensure children did not use electronic media in the hour before bed and, if possible, not to leave devices such as mobiles in bedrooms overnight.

He was aware it was a difficult ask for teenagers to turn off their mobiles overnight, citing research that only 3 per cent did so, and the presence of such devices in their rooms was "too tempting" even for the well-intentioned.

A professor of sleep medicine at the Woolcock Institute, Ron Grunstein, said lack of sleep can lead to inattentiveness, poor attention spans and microsleeps. He urged parents to ensure technology use was not interfering with sleep.

"I don't want to sound old-fashioned, but I think it is a matter of setting boundaries and discipline," he said.

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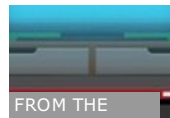
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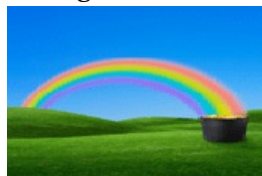
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