

Children's Sleep Problems

Children vary in the amount of sleep they need and the amount of time it takes to fall asleep. How easily they wake up and how quickly they can resettle are also different for each child.

After a traumatic event it is important that you help your child develop and return to good sleep habits. The following tips can help:

- Establish a quiet period before bedtime
- Set a consistent schedule for children
- Avoid lengthy naps during the day
- Provide nutritious meals/snacks and avoid giving children caffeine or sugary drinks
- Allow children to take a comfort item to bed with them—teddy bear, blanket, etc
- Avoid letting children sleep with you
- Allow children to have a night light

Respond quickly to children after a nightmare—reassure them they are safe. Allow them to tell you about the dream. Empower them by giving them a 'magical' wand or dream catcher to keep under their pillow.

Remember to be patient, with yourself and with children, during periods of sleep disruption. A negative response by adults can often make sleep disruption worse—especially if it follows a traumatic event.

If you are concerned that your child's sleep problems are not resolving, consult with their pediatrician for appropriate recommendations.

Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing and processing the event can assist children and loved ones clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences.

Children and loved ones can utilize traumatic experiences as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and even protective instinct skills.

Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



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Sleeping Tips

Victim Services Unit

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Common Causes for Sleep Problems

Trauma or Crisis—the body may dump chemicals into your system in what is known as the “fight or flight” response.

Stress—school or job-related stress, family or relationship stress, worry about the death of a loved one or a serious medical condition, etc.

Shift work—the night shift pits the sleep cycle against the body’s natural rhythm.

Jet lag—the body is responding to another time zone.

Noise—a snoring partner, barking dog, loud neighbors, soaring airplanes, etc.

Environmental discomfort—too hot, too cold, too light, bed’s too hard, etc.

Medications—some medications interrupt sleep (talk with your doctor if you are noticing a side effect).

Sleep disorders—such as sleep apnea, which is interrupted breathing during sleep.

Caffeine intake—especially when consumed in the evening hours.

Tobacco use—nicotine craving can wake up users three to four hours after they go to bed.

Alcohol use—inhibits deep, restorative sleep.

Do I Have a Sleep Problem?

Sleep restores the body and mind and helps us maintain our mental and physical health. At one time or another we all may experience the inability to get adequate sleep. You may be experiencing a sleep problem now if you answer yes to any of the following questions:

- Does it take you more than 30 minutes to fall asleep?
- Are you awake for a significant amount of time during the night?
- Do you wake in the middle of the night and find it difficult to go back to sleep?
- Do you wake up groggy and still tired?
- Do you experience daytime drowsiness?

What May Help

When you are filled with emotional pain and have a million worries, it is hard to get a good night’s sleep. Don’t be concerned if you don’t get a full night’s sleep every night, because people are able to manage on less sleep than they think. However, these tips can help to get some of that needed rest.

- Have the same “sleep time” ritual every night. For an hour before retiring, do the same quiet routine to get ready. Try to go to bed at the same time each night.
- Try including some new activities in the routine that are boring or repetitive. Brushing your hair or rocking in a rocking chair can be helpful repetitive activities. Looking at a picture book or reading something that normally ‘puts you to sleep’ are helpful boring activities.
- If you find yourself remembering “things to do” or worrying as you try to go to sleep, make a list before beginning your sleep routine—mentally and physically put the list aside for tomorrow.
- When you lay down, try progressively relaxing the muscles of your body. Beginning with your face, relax those muscles. Then try your head. Follow with your neck. Keep relaxing muscles as you “move” down your body all the way to the very tip of your toes. Many individuals fall asleep before they reach their feet.

- If you can’t go to sleep within 20 minutes, get up. You are less likely to fall asleep the longer you toss and turn. Try some quiet, boring and/or repetitive activities until you feel ready to try and sleep again.
- Sleep where you “fall.” If you feel sleepy watching TV, just go to sleep there. Now, while the emotional stress is so high, it is better to catch some sleep where you can. Later, when your life has settled down, you can retrain yourself to sleep in a bed.
- If you are awakened by suddenly, feeling terrified, try to make your home feel as safe as possible. Take any measures you can to feel secure where you sleep.
- If you have nightmares or uncomfortable dreams, do not just try to ignore them. Write them down in the night when you wake up. Think about what they mean and think of ways you could “change” the dream to make it more tolerable.
- Leave your troubles outside the bedroom door. Make your bedroom a worry-free zone. If you start thinking about problems when you are in bed, try deep breathing or visualization techniques.
- Create a cozy sleep environment: wear comfortable pajamas, adjust the room temperature, darken the room, use soft comfortable bedding that enhances your sleep experience. If your bed is too hard or lumpy invest in a new one. If noise is an issue, try to address the root of the problem: you may ask your neighbors to be quieter, etc.
- When you are well rested, you will naturally be better able to cope with stress.
- If you experience a sleep problem for one week or longer, talk with your doctor. He or she can evaluate you for a sleep disorder and suggest additional lifestyle changes or treatment options.