



## Childhood Sleep Problems

Many children have problems with sleep, such as:

- difficulty falling asleep
- waking too early
- frequent waking
- difficulty sleeping alone
- waking up crying
- nightmares
- bedwetting
- sleep walking and talking
- teeth grinding and clenching
- daytime sleepiness

Childhood sleep problems are often related to poor sleep habits. Sleep problems that persist frequently are related to anxiety about separating from parents and/or falling asleep alone. Children with anxiety, depression, and/or AD/HD commonly experience difficulties with quieting their mind/bodies and falling asleep. When children reach adolescence there are frequently problems with sleep wake cycles because as teenagers natural sleep cycle is skewed to going to bed later and waking up late.

Infrequent nightmares are common in childhood and it is not abnormal for the content to involve major threats to the child's well-being. For some children the nightmares cause anxiety, are frequent, or interfere with restful sleep. Sleep terrors (night terrors), sleepwalking, and sleep talking are less common and are called "parasomnias". Sleep terrors are different from nightmares, as the child will usually scream uncontrollably, seem awake, but is not able to communicate or be comforted. These events are quite stressful to parents/family members but are not recalled by the child. Children who sleep walk may appear to be awake but are actually asleep. Sleepwalking varies from sitting up in bed, to walking, to other complex behavior (such as unlocking doors and leaving the home).

The following are recommended treatment approaches for sleep problems in youth:

- Behavioral interventions
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Medical evaluation and medication (when appropriate)

When to seek help:

- If sleep problems persist or occur frequently
- If there are safety concerns (such as falling down stairs from sleep walking)

- If problems with sleep are affecting daily functioning (for example, excessive daytime sleepiness, changes in school work, increased irritability, and/or difficulty getting along with others).

Links:

Anxiety

Depression

Nightmares/Night terrors

Bedwetting

Separation Anxiety