



**TECH/LIFE BALANCE:
HELPING FAMILIES THRIVE IN A DIGITAL WORLD**

Sleep Family Guide



California Partners
PROJECT

**THIS GUIDE OFFERS THE
FOLLOWING RESOURCES:**

TOOL 1: Understand What's Getting in the Way

TOOL 2: Build a Sleep Plan Together

TOOL 3: Lead by Example

Introduction



"Sleep is one of the most powerful protectors of our children's well-being—and one of the first things to suffer in a world that never powers down. As a parent, I know how hard it can be to create calm at the end of the day. But when sleep suffers, everything suffers: mood, focus, physical health, and emotional resilience. Protecting sleep means creating rhythms that allow our children's brains and bodies to fully restore, and I am proud to offer this guide to help parents establish consistent, screen-free evening routines rooted in calm and connection."

— **Jennifer Siebel Newsom**, First Partner of California & Co-Founder of the California Partners Project

When we sleep well, we regulate emotions more easily, engage more fully with physical activity, and make better meal and snack choices. When sleep is disrupted, everything else gets harder. This guide helps families understand the importance of sleep for health and well-being, what may be getting in the way of healthy sleep habits, and how to take small, realistic steps toward more restful nights.

**DID
YOU KNOW?**

Drowsy driving is responsible for approximately 1 million motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. per year (20% of total crashes). ([Harvard Medical School Division of Sleep Medicine & National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#)).

Only about 1 in 4 high school students get at least 8 hours of sleep on school nights, according to the [CDC](#). Sleeping fewer than 8 hours per night on a regular basis is associated with increased risk for developing serious medical conditions—including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease—and shortened lifespan. ([Harvard Medical School Division of Sleep Medicine](#)).

TOOL 1

Understand What's *Getting in the Way*



Sleep challenges look different in every home, and they don't all have the same cause. For some children, ongoing sleep difficulties may be linked to medical or sleep-related conditions (like insomnia, sleep apnea, or anxiety) that benefit from support from a pediatrician or sleep specialist. For others, sleep struggles are shaped by daily habits like inconsistent schedules, late-night stimulation, or difficulty unwinding.

And for many families, technology plays a role—whether it's keeping the brain alert, disrupting routines, or making it harder to fully power down at night.

Understanding what's driving your child's sleep challenges can help you focus on the changes that will matter most. Let's start by identifying what feels most urgent before jumping into solutions.

Common Sleep Struggles

- ☐ Is your child taking their phone, tablet, or gaming device to bed, or sleeping with it nearby?
- ☐ Are screens or devices a constant point of conflict at bedtime?
- ☐ Do notifications wake your child in the night?

"I've seen many times my kids fall asleep with the phone right there still going, but they're asleep. And the same thing for me. I know it can't be a good thing, but I feel like it helps me sleep."

— Mother of two, Central Valley

"The 10-year-old, she will get up and sneak a device. We've had trouble where my alarm didn't go off because it's also our phones. One night I got up at 4 in the morning, and the phone was actually in her bed."

— Grandmother of four, Bay Area

Inconsistent Schedules

- ☐ Does your child keep a much later sleep schedule on weekends—staying up late and sleeping in—then struggle to fall asleep Sunday night?
- ☐ Is staying up late used as a reward, like for a movie night or extra video game time?
- ☐ Do sleep rules vary across co-parenting households?

"With my 16 year old it is hard because he lives with his father [too]. So he is transitioning back and forth and his dad doesn't care if he is on the phone at 2, 3 in the morning... And here the rules are set. The rules are, 'No, that's it. After 9 o'clock, during school nights, no more phone.'"

— Mother of four, Central Coast

Stress & Anxiety

- ☐ Does your child seem wound up at bedtime, even after a quiet evening?
- ☐ Is your child staying up to finish homework, or lying awake worrying about it?
- ☐ Does your child feel pressure to stay up so they don't miss messages, posts, or group chats?

"For a lot of teens, their bedroom is like their studio apartment—it's where they do everything. Technology makes it too easy to make your bed the place where you stress out, or scroll, or process whatever happened that day."

— Dr. Caroline Okorie, Pediatric Pulmonology, Sleep Medicine

Signs You Might Be Missing

Poor sleep doesn't always look like tiredness. It can show up in other ways, including:

- ☐ Does your child seem more irritable, moody, or emotionally reactive than usual?
- ☐ Is your child having trouble focusing, remembering things, or keeping up with schoolwork?
- ☐ Have you noticed your child pulling back from activities they usually enjoy?
- ☐ Is your child consistently hard to wake in the morning?

A NOTE FOR CAREGIVERS

Sleep doesn't happen in a vacuum. Noise, safety concerns, housing conditions, and neighborhood environments can affect how easily families are able to rest. While some factors may be outside a caregiver's control, small changes can still make a meaningful difference.

TOOL 2

Build a Sleep Plan Together

Talking about bedtime and devices doesn't need to feel like a battle of wills, and you don't need to perfect sleep habits to get started. The goal is to help kids understand their own patterns well enough to make healthy choices in high school, in college, and beyond.



Keep in Mind

- Understand their developmental stage. Around puberty, the body clock shifts naturally—kids are wired to stay up later. Consider how you might approach sleep routines if you tend to fall asleep before your kids do.
- Bring conversation up during moments of calm, not mid-conflict.
- Stay curious, and avoid lecturing. Give your child space to talk before you respond.
- When possible, let teens lead the conversation, even if it goes in a different direction than you planned. Connection matters most.

“I’ve kind of given up on arguing that kids can’t use screens before bed. They just can’t use it in their sleeping space. It’s not about no screens at all—just don’t bring it into your bedtime routine.”

— Dr. Lauren Hale, Professor of Family, Population, and Preventive Medicine at Stony Brook University School of Medicine

Conversation Starters

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

- What's your favorite thing to do right before you go to sleep?
- Do you ever feel like your brain is still going when it's time for lights out?
- If your tablet had its own bedtime, what time do you think it should be?
- Is there anything bugging you today? We can talk about it before you go to sleep.

FOR OLDER KIDS

- Have you noticed how you feel the morning after a late night? What's different?
- What helps you feel good the next day? What gets in the way of that?
- Is there anything you do before bed that makes it harder to fall asleep?
- If you tracked how you felt for a week, what do you think you'd notice about the nights you slept well versus the nights you didn't?
- What would it take for you to feel okay putting your phone in another room at night?



Actionable Strategies

Make a plan for devices at night. Before setting a rule, start with trust. Let your child know you believe they can make good choices. Let them know that moving the phone is about protecting their sleep, not controlling them. Then work out the logistics together: a shared charging station in the kitchen or living room, a small ritual that kicks off the bedtime routine, a standalone alarm clock to replace the phone. **Older kids are more likely to stick with a plan they helped create.**

Build in a 30-minute wind-down ritual. A “wind-down” is a short, consistent transition before bed—when the body and brain shift out of the stimulation of the day and into a calmer, slower rhythm for sleep. Dim the lights and choose quieter activities about 30 minutes before bed like drawing, stretching, a warm bath, soft music, or quiet conversation. For some kids, especially neurodivergent children, this buffer can make falling asleep much easier.

Calm the mind before bed. For anxious kids, writing out tomorrow's to-do list before bed can help the brain let go of unfinished mental loops. Some families also find it helpful to pair this with a brief mindfulness practice—such as a few slow breaths, noticing the body relaxing, or listening to a short guided meditation.



The California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being offers free mindfulness activities through its *Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind* campaign.

"When we are having trouble winding down, [my kids] have a meditation app that we all do together. [My son] had a lot of anxiety... so that would kind of help him relax and de-stress. He used technology kind of like a meditation thing to get him to de-stress or decompress. But of course you have to monitor it to make sure he's not on his phone scrolling while he's supposed to be sleeping."

— Parent of teens, Central Valley

End the day with a story. Reading before bed signals to the brain that sleep is coming, creates a moment of connection that screens can't replicate, draws the mind inward, and calms the nervous system. Let kids choose the stories or audiobooks. For ideas, families can explore First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom's Book Club.

"My oldest can read. So I have her reading physical books before bed for an hour. I tell her you can stay up, and read books as long as you're reading. So she'll fall asleep with a bunch of books around her."

— Mom of three, Central Valley

"The bedroom should be like a sanctuary—a safe, peaceful space. Try to avoid using it for punishment or stress. If you want to optimize sleep, that matters more than most people realize."

— Dr. Caroline Okorie, Pediatric Pulmonology, Sleep Medicine

Create a sleep-friendly environment. Cool (65–70°F), dark, and quiet conditions help the body settle into sleep. Use red or orange nightlights instead of blue or white light, which can suppress melatonin. Try to reserve the bed for sleep rather than homework, scrolling, or worrying. Over time, this helps train the brain to associate the bed with rest.

Keep schedules consistent. For teens, up to two hours of catch-up sleep on weekends can support mood and reduce anxiety symptoms, but sleeping in longer can delay the body clock and make Sunday night harder. A short nap (15–20 minutes) before 3:00 p.m. is often a better catch-up strategy. Limiting afternoon caffeine can also help. Remember that the biological clock shifts later during adolescence, so when teens want to stay up or sleep later, they're responding to a real biological change—not laziness.

"And how early we make teens get up in the morning... have some compassion for them... because it's biologically just so rude to be waking them up so early."

— Dr. Jessee Dietch, Licensed Clinical Health Psychologist, Oregon State University

Sleep, movement, and nutrition work together. Morning outdoor light helps calibrate the body clock: natural light early in the day signals to the brain when to be alert and when to wind down at night. Movement during the day increases the likelihood of deep, restorative sleep. And when sleep falls short, it can disrupt hunger hormones and increase cravings for calorie-dense foods. For more on these connections, see the *Movement & Outdoor Activity Guide* and the *Nourishing Mind & Body Guide* in this series.

"In addition to trying to cut down on blue light in the evenings/middle of the night... increase the amount of bright light exposure, ideally sunlight, during the day. If you don't have enough bright light during the day, the impact of blue light at night can be more impactful... Earlier in the day is better—even on an overcast day, it still counts."

— Dr. Jessee Dietch, Licensed Clinical Health Psychologist, Oregon State University

TOOL 3

Lead by Example

Research shows that the #1 predictor of an adolescent's media use is their caregiver's own media use. Modeling the habits you want to build is the most powerful thing you can do. If you're a parent who regularly falls asleep before your kids do, you're not alone. Focus on building trust, being honest about your own limits, and helping your child develop the self-awareness to make healthy choices on their own.

"I spend 90% of my day on the phone because of work, and I am in front of the computer working or doing homework. So it's actually setting a bad example, but it's my life."

— Mother of teens, Central Valley

Mindful Questions

- ☐ Does my phone come to bed with me? What am I using it for?
- ☐ How do I want to start my day? How does my device factor into it?
- ☐ What is my wind-down routine at night? What do I want it to be?
- ☐ Am I asking my kids to follow habits that I am not practicing?
- ☐ If I tend to fall asleep before my kids do, am I building in intentional time to connect with them earlier in the evening?



Practical Tips

Charge your phone outside the bedroom.

This single change removes the biggest barrier to phone-free sleep for most people. It also models exactly what you're asking of your kids. Get a standalone alarm clock. Put a book or something soothing on the nightstand where the phone used to be.

Make it a household approach. A wind-down that applies to everyone is more sustainable than rules that only target children. When kids see adults put devices away with intention, the behavior becomes normal rather than punitive. Kids who have a genuine say in the household plan—especially teens—are far more likely to follow through with it.

“What we implement as a household, a routine, a practice before bedtime for rest, is that on weekdays, no cellphones after 8:45 – 9:00 p.m. at the latest. Cellphones stay outside. Laptops are charged outside of their rooms. Everything stays in the dining room. This is something we apply, we discuss as a family, until high school. And it's what has worked for us.”

— Parent of a teen, Los Angeles

“If helpful sleep habits become part of everyday family life, they can help prevent long-term sleep challenges before they begin. Small steps now can help avoid bigger challenges later.”

— Dr. Caroline Okorie, Pediatric Pulmonology, Sleep Medicine

When to Seek Support

Most sleep struggles improve with consistent routines. Reach out to your child's pediatrician or a sleep specialist if you notice loud or frequent snoring, pauses in breathing, recurring sleepwalking or night terrors, sleep problems persisting for weeks despite changes, or significant mood and behavioral concerns tied to sleep. If you're not sure, just ask. You know your child best.

Two California resources can help you get started. [BrightLife Kids](#) offers free mental health coaching for families with children ages 0–12 and [Soluna](#) provides confidential support for young people ages 13–25. You can access both at calhope.org.

A Note on Sleep Supplements

It's understandable to look for extra support when sleep isn't working. Sleep supplements—including melatonin, “sleep gummies,” teas, and topical products—are growing in popularity. But there are real questions about how these products are regulated, how accurate dosages are, and how they affect children's developing bodies.

“There are sleep lotions and sleep bath bombs with melatonin added that you can buy at the drugstore, and some of them have an absolutely mind-boggling amount of melatonin in them. Those products should be avoided at all costs.”

— Dr. Jesse Dietch, Licensed Clinical Health Psychologist, Oregon State University

If you're considering a sleep supplement, consult your pediatrician before use. In some cases, short-term support may be appropriate, but supplements are not a substitute for consistent sleep routines and healthy habits.

Additional Resources

- National Sleep Foundation – [thensf.org](https://www.thensf.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics – [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)
- Nationwide Children's Hospital Sleep Tips – [nationwidechildrens.org](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org)
- First Partner's Book Club – gov.ca.gov/about/first-partner/ca-for-all-kids/cakidsread
- Let's Sleep – [letssleep.org](https://www.letssleep.org)
- BrightLife Kids – [hellobrightline.com/brightlifekids](https://www.hellobrightline.com/brightlifekids)
- Soluna – [solunaapp.com](https://www.solunaapp.com)
- CDC: Sleep and Health – [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

About the Research

Caregiver perspectives in this guide come from California Partners Project focus groups and interviews with 77 caregivers across the state. Over 60 experts were consulted across fields including medicine, mental health, education, and child development.

Learn more and explore the full series at CalPartnersProject.org/TechLifeBalance.

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**For more tips and resources for families, visit
www.calpartnersproject.org.**



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