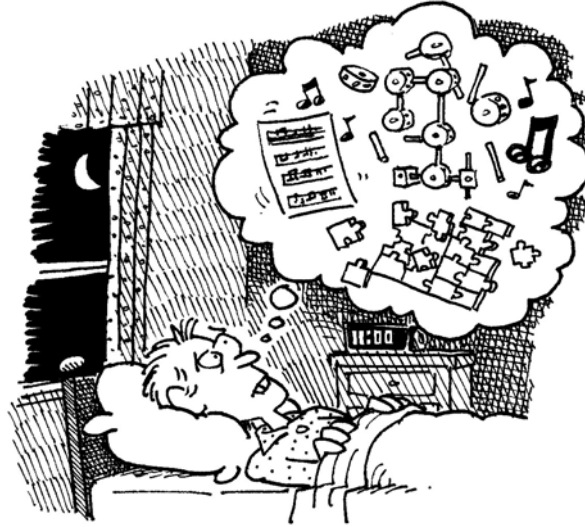

Sleep Issues for Visual-Spatial Learners

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When I was pregnant with our first child, somebody gave me a card I've never forgotten. It read, "Having a baby is Nature's way of telling you that you were getting too much sleep!" In the thirteen years since, there have been many a night I've longed for an evening of children preparing for bed without incident, dosing off peacefully, remaining blissfully asleep through an uninterrupted night and waking—as a family—thoroughly rested and ready for the day. Since studying the characteristics of visual-spatial learners, those who think in images, not words, I've wondered whether or not sleep issues are more common among these kids than among their auditory-sequential counterparts. Do your visual-spatial kids struggle to get to sleep at night? Are they much "too wired" for sleep at bedtime? Perhaps now that the left hemisphere of their brains is free to take a break from the school day, the right hemisphere is wide awake and ready to create inventions or go off on imaginative adventures.

If your kids have trouble getting to sleep at night, I've got some tips that might help. First, your children need to understand how important sleep is for their body and brain. They may think they're getting along just fine without much sleep at night. But, if they were truly getting the amount of sleep their bodies needed, every night, they would do better in school, sports, music—even their relationships with friends and family would improve. Each person's need for sleep is different so there really are no guidelines after babyhood of how much sleep a person needs. However, if your kids find themselves dozing off in class, or unable to focus clearly, they should start with an earlier bedtime.

Sleep researchers believe that sleep, particularly deep sleep,

...allows the brain to review and consolidate all the streams of information it gathered while awake. Another (study) suggests that we sleep in order to allow the brain to stock up on fuel and flush out wastes. A third, which has been gaining currency, is that sleep operates in some mysterious way to help you master various skills, such as how to play the piano and ride a bike. (Time, December 20, 2004, *Why We Sleep* by Christine Gorman, pp. 48-49)

Researchers have learned that most mammals, including humans, switch between two different phases of sleep: REM (rapid eye movement) and non-REM. It is during REM sleep that people experience increased brain activity and vivid dreams. REM sleep is critical for humans but you have to go through the stages of non-REM sleep in order to get there. In fact, “your ability to recognize certain patterns on a computer screen is directly tied to the amount of REM sleep you get.” (Time, December 20, 2004, *Why We Sleep* by Christine Gorman, p. 48-49) Also, learning something new just before your children go to sleep will help them remember that information better. So, any significant studying for an exam should probably be done just before they go to bed.

Have you ever gone to sleep with a problem on your mind, only to wake up in the morning and have the answer? This is because your brain is still working, reviewing the day’s events, even though you are no longer conscious. You might encourage your children to, “sleep on” an issue before making important decisions. They may be surprised to have uncovered a solution during the night!

Once your children understand the importance of sleep, how do you get them to sleep in the first place, right? Here are some tips to help your children become relaxed and restful enough to get a good night’s sleep:

1. Set their body clocks by keeping the same sleep schedule, seven days a week. Don’t let them try to catch up by sleeping late on weekends.
2. Create an environment that helps your kids sleep, not one that keeps them awake. A cool, dark and uncluttered room should help. Eyeshades or ear plugs can also help.
3. No caffeine in the afternoon or evening. This means no soda pop or chocolate. They should avoid spicy foods and finish eating at least three hours before bedtime.
4. No computers, TV or arguments half an hour before bed. Research indicates that the body’s production of melatonin (which helps one sleep) is reduced by playing computer or watching television.
5. Offer a before-bed snack. Some foods naturally spark a release of serotonin, which helps induce sleep: a glass of milk, a piece of whole-wheat toast with a slice of cheese, half a peanut butter sandwich, or oatmeal with bananas might do the trick.
6. Soothing music is often helpful, so are warm baths.

So, let's say you've finally gotten the kids to sleep. Now, how do you help them stay asleep? Snoring is an issue not exclusive to adults. As many as 12% of all children suffer snoring issues that can have a dramatic impact on their ability to get a good night's sleep. And, when a child snores, new studies suggest, he or she stands a better chance of underperforming in school compared to a child that does not snore. "What research is showing now is that snoring can cause issues with behavioral problems, attention issues, and difficulty concentrating," says Dr. Norman Friedman, a sleep disorder expert at Children's Hospital in Denver.

Both of my kids have been prone to nightmares. Do your visual-spatial children suffer from nightmares that seem so real they have trouble shaking them from their memory when they wake? Such nightmares typically happen during the deepest part of sleep, the REM sleep, and the type of sleep your child needs most. You might try using a dream catcher and hanging it above their beds. Dream catchers have been used for generations. Native American legend says that dream catchers sift through the sleeping person's dreams, catching those that are good and sending the bad dreams through the hole in the center. If it helps your children drift off into a deep enough sleep that nightmares aren't troublesome for them, they'll have done the trick!

Of course there are other sleep issues, including sleepwalking, sleeptalking, bedwetting and night terrors, to name a few. According to the website, Information About Children's Sleep for Parents and Teachers (www.sleepforkids.org), you should talk to your child's doctor if any of the following are observed:

- A newborn or infant who is extremely and consistently fussing
- A child who is having difficulty breathing or whose breathing is noisy
- A child who snores, particularly if their snoring is loud
- Unusual nighttime awakenings
- Difficulty falling asleep and maintaining sleep, especially if you see daytime sleepiness and/or behavioral problems

Please visit the National Sleep Foundation at www.sleepfoundation.org for more on your child's sleep patterns. And here's to many rest-filled nights ahead!

Alexandra "Allie" Golon is Director of the Visual-Spatial Resource, a subsidiary of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, in Denver, Colorado. As a founding member of the Visual-Spatial Resource Access Team, a former G/T teacher and homeschooling parent to two gifted visual-spatial learners, Allie brings a wealth of experience to her books, *Raising Topsy-Turvy Kids: Successfully Parenting Your Visual-Spatial Child*, and, *If You Could See the Way I Think: A Handbook for Visual-Spatial Kids*. Her latest release, *The Visual-Spatial Classroom: Differentiation Strategies that Engage Every Learner*, is a rich source of classroom strategies for teachers of all grades. Allie has been invited to present on parenting and teaching visual-spatial learners at state, national and international venues. She has counseled dozens of families regarding harmoniously parenting visual-spatial learners as well as on various homeschooling issues, and has appeared on talk radio programs and in various print media. For more information, please visit www.visualspatial.org. Allie can be reached at alex@visualspatial.org.