What did we do?

We consulted with a wide and diverse group of 60 parents and carers from across Oxfordshire on the sleep pattern of teenagers and how this impacts on their education, behaviour and health. The topic of sleep enabled parents and carers to express how hard it is to bring up teenagers in today's society whatever background you are from and whatever ability and needs your children have.

“I let my son stay on the X-Box until 2am in the morning, because at least I know where he is and he’s safe, if he goes and hangs out with his mates there’s always some sort of trouble.” (Parent)

Sleep and Safeguarding

Foster carers discussed their experiences with children in care and suggested the main issues are:

• Children’s fear of night times, fear of sleep and night terrors
• Breaking teenagers’ poor sleep patterns
• Managing teenagers’ behaviour
• Coping with exhaustion

“My boy came to me with a terrible sleep pattern, he was out till all hours, it has taken a long time but, by getting his sleep pattern right, he has really improved his behaviour at school.” (Foster Carer)
Sleep routines, boundaries and the hidden hour

Parents and carers discussed their experiences. The main issues are:

**Parenting: How to get it right?**

- The impact of lack of sleep on teenagers’ appetite, physical activity, mental health, moods, behaviour, etc.
- Setting boundaries and routines with teenagers and introducing good sleep patterns.
- Limiting access to facebook, play station, x-box, mobile phones etc.
- Dealing with aggressive and confrontational behaviour.
- Getting teenagers “job ready”, in terms of a normal sleep pattern.
- Encouraging teenagers to do more sport and socialise safely.
- Letting teenagers out at night and encourage them to act responsibly and be safe around alcohol and drugs.
- Coping with your own exhaustion
- Where to go for help

“It’s not until you start talking about your teenager’s sleep pattern that you realise how important sleep is.” (Parent)

**Sleep and teenagers with disabilities**

Main questions / issues:

- Can you refer to Peadiatric Community and Adolescent Mental Health Services with just a sleep problem to avoid crisis?
- Where to go for advice and guidance on sleep problems, sleep hygiene and sleep routine?
• Support for parents who themselves are sleep deprived.

• Exercise and safe socialising help with sleep; this is harder for teenagers with additional special needs due to a shortage of leisure and social provision.

• More information for professionals to signpost parents and offer them practical support.

• The impact on siblings and their achievement.

“It’s been so good to come here and see that I’m not the only parent with problems, and I’m not a failure.” (Parent)

Actions and next steps

Information

• The full reports from Parent/Carer and Children and Young People’s Sounding Boards will be disseminated to health, schools and Children & Young People’s Services.

• Top Tips on good sleep hygiene that incorporate parents and carers and children and young people’s quotes and ideas will be available on the Oxfordshire Family Information Service website. These will be disseminated to Home School Link Workers, Children’s Centres, Community Adolescent and Mental Health Services, Health Visitors, Social Workers, and Foster Carers.

• Parent/carer-friendly versions of Top Tips will be produced.

“I used to be so embarrassed when the school would ring me to say he fell asleep in school, I didn’t know who to really go to for advice, I didn’t realise that because we didn’t have any routine at home, he couldn’t concentrate at school.” (Parent)
Support for teenagers with additional special needs

- Professionals will be trained to know what is available for parents and to be able to offer them some practical support / advice.

- The John Radcliffe Hospital offers a sleep clinic that looks at physical sleep problems, such as apnoea. Your GP can refer you to this clinic.

- Top Tips for sleep to be sent to parent support groups and shared on their websites to get the information in the public domain.

“This meeting has shown the importance of sleep for teenagers and how it affects everything they do, parents really need somewhere they could go to, to get some information and support”.
(Participant)

Many thanks to the professionals and parents who attended and supported the meeting.

This is a Participation & Play Team publication. For the full report and minutes please email:

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