



Guidelines for a Healthy Lifestyle

These are a set of common-sense ideas that are truly helpful to children with attentional, learning and behavioral/emotional difficulties. They are part of a lifelong set of habits that help to manage stress, sustain energy for attention and effort to non-preferred tasks, enhance learning, reduce frustration, and improve self esteem.

The key to these simple ideas is to "practice" them regularly. These are behaviors, choices and commitments that have a real benefit when they are a part of a person's daily routine. However regular "practice" serves to eliminate and reduce many of the ups and downs that befuddle children with attention, learning and social/emotional difficulties.

We encourage parents to consider how to make some of these activities into family habits. Do not just "practice" these activities for your kids! Do them for yourself. In addition, your children are more likely to make them a part of their own lifestyle if they see you "doing" rather than "saying."

Sleep Well

A good night's sleep can boost one's mood, ability to focus, and energy level. Most studies recommend at least seven hours of sleep a night for optimum rest. Even if you plan enough time for a full seven hours, you may not be getting the most of it. Diet and exercise are key factors in achieving successful rest.

A good night's sleep can boost one's mood, ability to focus, and energy level. Children with ADHD need just as much, if not more, sleep than their peers, but often have trouble achieving it because of over-stimulation and other attentional problems. Diet and exercise are also key factors in achieving successful rest, but you can improve sleep by keeping a consistent, early bedtime and using several other strategies.

These might include:

- Reducing or even eliminating caffeine from your child's diet. Soda beverages and chocolate can contain significant amounts of caffeine. Studies recommend that adults stick to non-caffeinated beverages after 4 p.m. so that their bodies may naturally wind down before bed. You may want make this switch for your children even earlier depending on their bedtime.
- Turning off the television an hour or more before bedtime. Keeping them away from the television during the day and increasing the amount of time they spend playing and exercising will also help them fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly.
- Quieter activities such as reading and coloring before bed to help your child wind down from the day.
- Scents such as lavender may help calm your child down. Place potpourri or a reed diffuser with a calming scent in your child's room. Avoid candles, incense, or anything else that is lit.
- Children with ADHD often find "white noise" to be calming. Use relaxation tapes like nature sounds or calming music at bedtime. Other options include running an electric fan in their room or tuning a radio to static.

Books

Kurcinka, Mary Sheedy. (2006). *Sleepless in America: Is Your Child Misbehaving or Missing Sleep?* New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Websites

<http://www.sleepwellbaby.com/> (Sells white noise machines, aromatic sprays, etc., and has articles on sleep disorders, patterns and sleep schedules.)