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Parents of Scottish primary schoolchildren urged to wake up to use of phones late at night and lack of sleep



Can't sleep? Children are taking gadgets to bed with them

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Sleep deprivation among primary pupils driven by excessive use of gadgets such as mobile phones has led schools across Scotland to start teaching pupils — and their parents — the value of getting enough shuteye.

Teachers in Dumfries and Galloway and Midlothian are among those taking part in a national Sound Sleep programme, devised by charity Sleep Scotland to train school staff how to explain the art of a good night's sleep.

One primary school in Stirling which took part in a pilot earlier this year reported a dramatic improvement in pupils' behaviour, performance and attendance at school, where previously youngsters struggled to concentrate and stay calm after staying up on smartphones until the early hours of the morning.

Mothers and fathers whose bad habits can be picked up by their children are also being taught better sleep routines at parents evenings and through home visits.

Key to improving sleep and the benefits that brings to attainment and attitude is incorporating an hour of tech-free relaxation before going to bed, Sleep Scotland said.

Sally Atkinson, depute head at East Plein Primary in Stirling which participated in the pilot, said: “What we have been seeing at school is pupils’ resilience levels and their ability to cope with everyday things or concentrate is very low, and that’s purely down to not having a good night’s sleep.

“They are quite distracted or frustrated and angry and they can’t focus on their learning, which obviously in the long-term has an impact on attainment. The difference after the sleep lessons was significant.”

There was a huge fall in absenteeism, staff found, including one girl whose attendance rose from 53% to 94% after looking at her and her father’s bedtime and sleep routines and limiting their use of gadgets such as mobiles.

Sylvia Ketrick, school health and wellbeing officer, said: “Word has now spread among parents and a few have come in asking for help so I will be going to visit them to go over bedtime and sleep routines because some are really struggling.

“It’s not just about the children, it’s about families changing. We are going to start looking at nursery children too because some parents have been saying they have trouble getting the ‘wee one’ sleeping.”

Janet Lindsay, Sleep Scotland training and development manager, said the programme — originally devised several years ago for secondary pupils — was now needed for early years too. She said: “We feel that by the time they get to secondary it’s a bit too late.”

Citing a survey she conducted of primary pupils four years ago in which most said they had smartphones which they took to bed with them, she said: “I think it’s only got more prevalent since then, and that’s what teachers are also telling me.

“A lot of them are of the opinion that we need to start at nursery so children have good habits by the time they start at primary school.”

Connect, formerly the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, agreed that many families with children of all ages needed help and should not be deemed “bad parents”.

A spokeswoman said: “There’s a growing realisation that sleep is critical for young people if they are going to learn. We’ve certainly had quite a number of parents who have said they would like this help.”