



# Are kids sleeping soundly? Views of Australian parents

## Poll report

Poll 35, February 2025



### Report highlights

- 42% of children aged 5 to 17 years have a problem with their sleeping pattern.
- One quarter of children (26%) have difficulty getting to sleep and one in five (19%) do not have a regular bed time.
- Children who consume caffeine after lunch or who use screens before bed are about twice as likely to have difficulty getting to sleep.
- Almost half of parents hold the misbeliefs that screen use before bed helps children wind down (47%) and that too much sleep is bad for teens (46%).
- One third of parents (32%) think that teens who can't get up for school are lazy.

## Sleep patterns and problems

Just under half of Australian children aged 5 to 17 years (42%) have a problem with their sleep pattern according to parents. Among primary school aged children (5 to 12 years), 45% have a problem with their sleep pattern compared to 37% of teens (13 to 17 years). Overall, 28% of children have a small problem and 14% have a moderate to large problem (see *Figure 1*). One in five children (21%) do not get the right amount of sleep according to parents.

Among children aged 5 to 17 years, one quarter (26%) have difficulty getting to sleep and one third (32%) seem tired in the morning. Older children are more likely to feel tired in the morning than younger children (41% of teens, compared to 27% of primary school-aged children).

One third of younger children (34%) do not like to sleep alone compared to one in ten (10%) older children. There was no difference between younger and older children in the reported prevalence of waking up during the night (20%) or worrying about things when going to bed (15%).

## Unhealthy sleep habits

Parents responded to a series of questions on unhealthy sleep habits which can be associated with sleep problems.<sup>1</sup> Overall, 29% of children usually or always use bed for things other than sleep, 28% usually or always use screens in bed in the hour before sleep, 30% use screens when not in bed in the hour before sleep, and 11% have caffeine after lunchtime on most days of the

## Sleep hygiene

Healthy sleep habits help people to get off to sleep and to sleep well. Sleep habits are also known as 'sleep hygiene'. Healthy sleep habits, or 'good sleep hygiene' includes a regular bedtime routine, a quiet and dark sleeping space used only for sleep, screen-free time in the hour before bed and avoiding caffeine after lunchtime.



week. Parents report that one in five children (19%) do not go to bed at a regular time.

Some unhealthy sleep habits were more common among teens than younger children (aged 5 to 12 years), including using screens in bed in the hour before sleep (44% vs 19%) and caffeine consumption after lunchtime (16% vs 8%) on most days of the week. Thirty-five per cent of teens and 22% of younger children are reported to consume caffeine containing food or drinks at least twice a week.

## Problems with sleep patterns in children

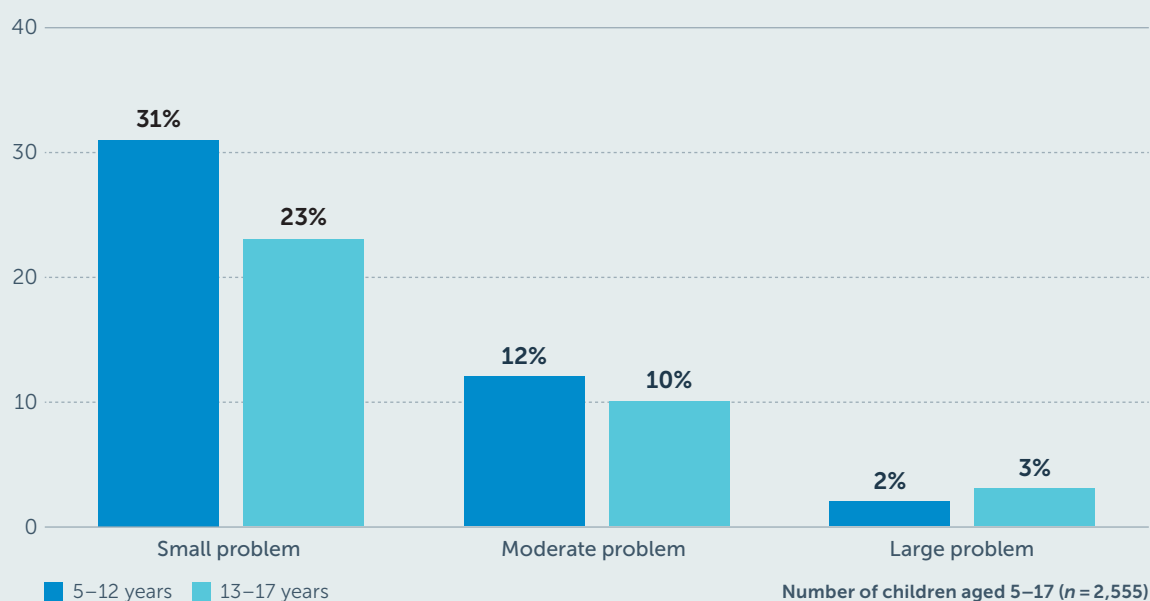


Figure 1.

## Unhealthy sleep habits and difficulty getting to sleep in children

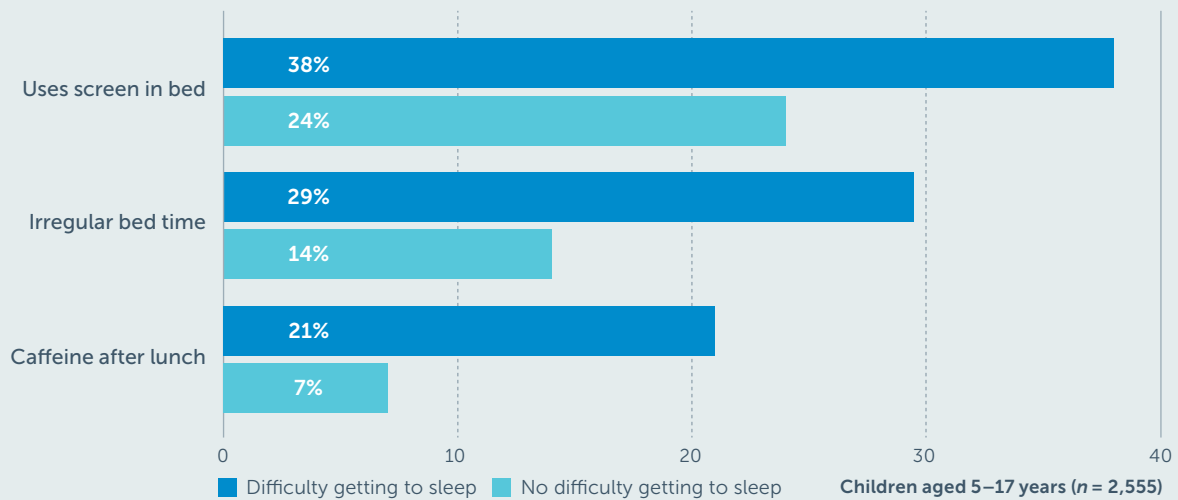


Figure 2.

There was a relationship between having unhealthy sleep habits and difficulty getting to sleep. Children with difficulty getting to sleep were more likely to have unhealthy sleep habits than those who do not have difficulty getting to sleep, including using a screen in bed (38% vs 24%), having an irregular bedtime (29% vs 14%), having caffeine after lunch (21% vs 7%) (see *figure 2*). Children who do not have a regular bedtime are almost twice as likely (risk ratio (RR)=1.9) to have difficulty getting to sleep than children who have a regular bedtime. Those who consume caffeine after lunch most days of the week are more than twice as likely to have difficulty getting to sleep (RR=2.1). The risk of having difficulty getting to sleep was also elevated for children using a screen in the hour before bed most nights of the week, for use both in the bed and out of the bed (RR=1.6).

Over half of parents (53%) report that screen use before bed causes disagreements in their home.

### Beliefs about sleep

#### Screen use before bed

Parents were asked about a range of beliefs and attitudes related to sleep for children. There is misunderstanding among parents about screen use and sleep, with almost half (47%) thinking that screen use helps their child wind down before bed. Of note, children viewing screens before bed were more likely to have trouble getting to sleep.

### Teens' sleeping patterns

Most parents (81%) recognise that teens' sleeping patterns are different from primary school-aged children. However, half of parents (46%) mistakenly believe that too much sleep is bad for teens and one third (32%) think that if teens cannot get up for school, they are lazy. Two in five parents (40%) mistakenly believe that teens need much less sleep than primary school-aged children. Adolescents go through changes to their circadian rhythm or 'body clock,' that often result in staying up late and sleeping in.<sup>2</sup>

Half of parents (52%) think that sleeping in on weekends makes up for lack of sleep during the week for teens. This approach may work in the short term for some young people but will not fully address a consistent lack of sleep.<sup>3</sup> Most parents (78%) believe that exercise in the evening helps teens wind down and go to bed, suggesting many may not be aware that exercising in the hour before bed may make sleep difficult for some.<sup>1</sup>

## Implications

A healthy night's sleep is key to a child's overall health and wellbeing. This study has shown that problems with sleep patterns are common and widespread in Australian school-aged children, from younger children through to teens.

Generally, primary school-aged children require 10 to 12 hours of sleep and teens need 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night.<sup>4</sup> However, individual needs vary, and the quality as well as the quantity of sleep is important. Many parents report their child has habits that may negatively impact sleep. There are many factors that play a role in establishing a healthy night's sleep. Social and emotional wellbeing can impact sleep, and it is important for parents to recognise that ongoing or severe sleep problems in children and teens can be a sign of a mental health issue such as anxiety or depression. If concerned, parents should speak to a health professional such as their general practitioner (GP) or a psychologist for assessment and support. Sleep habits or 'sleep hygiene' have a significant impact on sleep patterns. To help children and teens have enough good quality sleep, families should try where possible to build healthy sleep habits most or all days of the week. Healthy sleep habits include having a regular routine and time for bed, using beds only for sleeping where possible, no screen use in the hour before bed, no vigorous exercise in the hour before bed, reducing or stopping caffeine consumption and keeping phones out of the bedroom overnight.<sup>1,4,5</sup> Parents who are worried about their child's sleep may want to try adopting one or more healthy sleep habits that best fit their family.

This study highlights how common it is for children to have problematic or unhealthy sleep habits with associated difficulties getting off to sleep. Parents and children would benefit from further education about sleep hygiene, as well as support to implement healthy sleep habits effectively and sustainably in the home to ensure sleep is optimised.

**Almost half of children aged 5 to 17 years have a problem with their sleeping pattern**



## Data source and methods



This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by the Online Research Unit for The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. The survey was administered from 25 November to 2 December 2024, to a randomly selected population stratified by age, sex and state of residence, nationally representative of Australian parents aged 18 and older. Among Online Research Unit panel members contacted and eligible to participate, the completion rate was 68%. Parents ( $n=1,654$ ) included in this study had one or more children aged 5 to 17 years and answered questions on all their children's sleeping habits and behaviours ( $n=2,555$ ). They also reported on their knowledge and beliefs about child and teen sleep behaviours. All estimates in this report are weighted to reflect the distribution of the Australian population using figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## References



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