

# Exploring Parental Knowledge and Behaviors Associated with Sleep

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To explore parents' knowledge of and behaviors associated with their elementary school children's sleep patterns.

**Methods:** Moderator-lead focus group discussions and a brief survey were completed by English- and Spanish-speaking parents of 6- to 11-year-old children from 3 states (FL, NJ, WV).

**Results:** Survey results indicated that nearly all parents (94%) had a set bedtime for their children. Parents in the focus groups recognized the importance of children getting adequate sleep, noting that it promoted optimal performance in school as well as improved mood, prevented misbehavior, and optimized energy levels. However, no one mentioned links between adequate sleep and weight control. Specific bedtime routines varied by family (e.g., music, reading, watching TV, baths, cuddling), with most parents describing routines as being consistent and relaxing. As their kids have gotten older, maintaining a schedule that supports adequate sleep had become more challenging because the kids want to stay up later but have to wake up earlier for school, which created conflict at bedtime. Social media and technology (e.g., TV, phones, tablets) derailed getting to bed on time as well as extra-curricular activities scheduled late at night. To overcome these barriers, parents had set bedtimes and followed consistent routines. For families that do not have bedtime schedules, parents acknowledge that setting a bedtime initially may be met by some resistance, but advised that as kids become accustomed to the routine, conflicts over bedtimes decline. However, parents report that even with a well-established bedtime, they often have to check on their kids soon after they go to bed to be sure that they have turned off all technology and are actually sleeping. Parents did not feel the need to be good role models vis-à-vis sleep for their children because their kids went to bed before and/or woke up after parents and were unaware of parents' sleep schedule and routine.

**Conclusion:** Parents were not aware of the link between sufficient sleep and obesity prevention. Future interventions aiming to promote healthy weight-related behaviors in families with kids 6-11 should raise parents' awareness of sleep weight relationships and offer tips for overcoming barriers that interfere with establishing and maintaining bedtime routines.

## Methods

### Sample

- Parents of children aged 6-11
- English and Spanish speaking
- From WV, FL, or NJ

### Data Collection

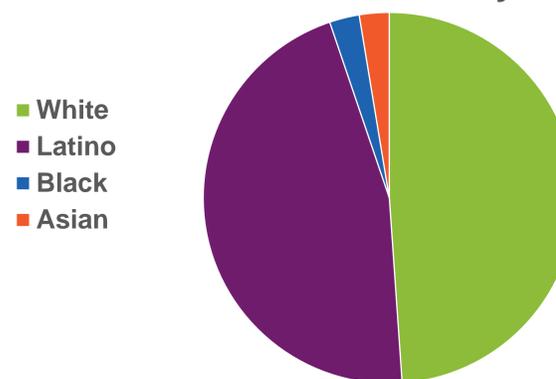
- Focus Groups (n=37)
  - Conducted in English or Spanish
  - Led by trained researchers using a scripted guide
  - Data content analyzed by researchers trained in qualitative data analysis
- Brief self-report survey (n=185)

## Results

### Demographics

- Language: 65% English speaking
- Gender: 97% female
- Education: 22% High school degree or less, 22% some college, 56% bachelor's degree or higher

### Race/Ethnicity



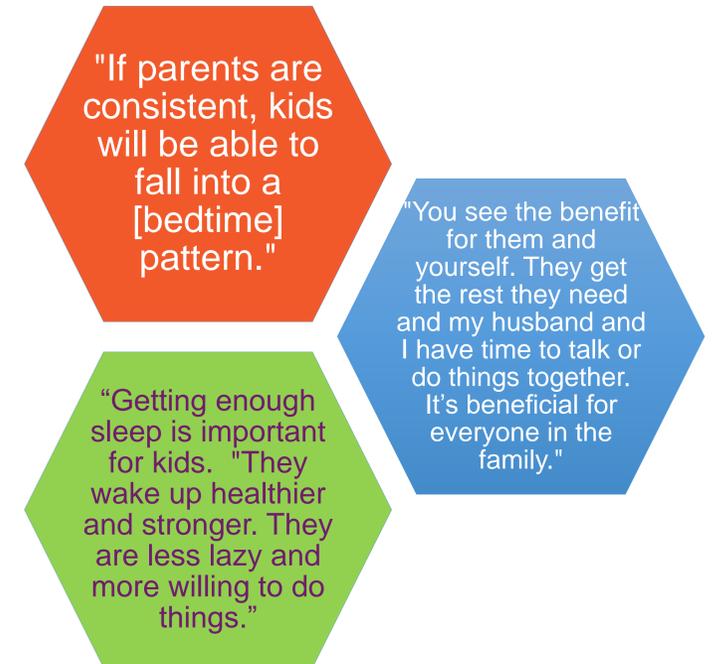
## Strengths & Limitations

### Strengths

- Focus groups in both English and Spanish
- Focus Groups led by trained moderators using scripted a moderator's guide to ensure uniformity and completeness
- Geographic diversity (NJ, FL, WV)

### Limitations

- Low representation of fathers
- Data were self-report



## Barriers & Facilitators to Helping Children Get Adequate Sleep

### Barriers

- Kids' preference for later bedtime
- Earlier start to school day
- Technology use interferes with sleep
- Increased extra-curricular activities since preschool

### Facilitators

- Setting and enforcing bedtime
- Having a calm, consistent bedtime routine (music, reading, bath)
- Check on kids to be sure they are sleeping

## Conclusion

- Parents recognize the importance of sleep for their 6 to 11 year olds.
- Parents did not note the link between adequate sleep and weight control.
- Future nutrition education programs should help parents recognize how adequate sleep can help family members manage their body weights.

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