



## Abstract

**Objectives:** Getting adequate sleep can lead to healthier weights, yet kids' perceptions of the importance of sleep and related barriers and facilitators remain unknown.

**Methods:** Elementary-school aged kids (6 to 11 years) completed a survey (n=194) and 44 participated in moderator led focus group discussions on sleep. Two trained researchers content analyzed focus group data.

**Results:** Surveyed kids had a set bedtime 5.24±2.21SD days/week. Focus group discussions indicated that kids felt sleep is very important to having sufficient energy throughout the day to play with friends and stay awake in school. Kids reported when they do not get enough sleep, they feel angry or irritable during the day. Kids agreed that parents feel that sufficient sleep is important for good health and learning. Barriers to falling asleep at night included loud noises (parent TV watching especially scary or violent shows, pets, siblings getting ready for bed) and activities distracting them from sleep (video games, toys, TV). Some reported that nightmares interrupted their sleep at night. To overcome sleep barriers, kids thought parents should establish a "before bed" routine, try to soothe children when are scared of the dark or wake up from bad dreams, and use a timer to remind kids that it is bedtime. Facilitators to getting to bed on time included having an established bedtime routine (brush teeth, use bathroom before bed), reducing distractions, talking about the importance of sleep, and creating a relaxing environment (sing a lullaby, read, play music, offer stuffed animals, use a nightlight). Kids agreed that parents' own nighttime behaviors affect their sleep. Even though parents are the enforcers of bedtime, their nighttime habits can interfere with their kids' sleep (making food, watching TV with volume too loud, snoring). Kids feel that they affect the sleep of their parents by waking them up for help; they also said that they can interfere with their siblings' sleep by keeping them up later than their bedtime.

**Conclusions:** Future nutrition education materials should help parents understand the links between sleep and weight and encourage them to establish a bedtime routine, create a relaxing sleep environment, have a set bedtime, and overcome barriers (loud or scary noises, activities) that prevent kids from getting adequate sleep.

## Methods

### Sample

- School-aged children (6-11 years old)
- From Florida, New Jersey, and West Virginia

### Data Collection

- Brief self-report survey (n=194)
- Focus group discussions (n=44)

### Data Analysis

- Continuous comparison to identify point of data saturation
- Content analysis to identify key themes

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# Getting Enough ZZZZs:

## Focus Groups with Elementary School Kids About Sleep

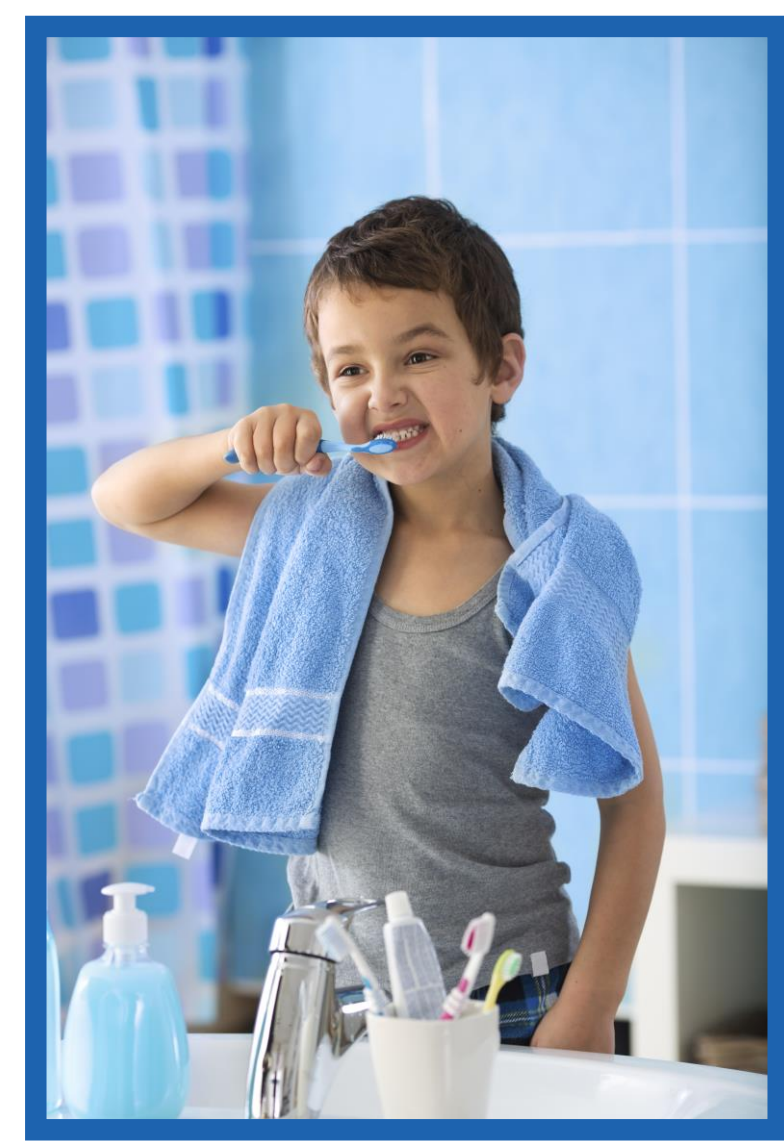
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## Results

*"My dad says go to bed. Sometimes I don't want to go to sleep, but they [parents] convince me that I'm tired."*



- Children reported having a set bedtime 5.24±2.21SD days/week
- Children agreed that sleep is important to having
  - Energy to play with friends
  - Energy to stay awake at school
- Children reported that getting inadequate sleep makes they feel irritable
- **Barriers** to adequate sleep
  - Loud noises (parent TV watching, pets, siblings)
  - Activities distracting them from sleep (video games, toys, TV)
- **Facilitators** to getting enough sleep
  - Have a set bedtime
  - Parents should comfort children when scared
  - Timer to remind kids that it is bedtime
  - Have an established bedtime routine (brush teeth, use bathroom before bed)
  - Reduce distractions (TV, phone, tablets)
  - Talk about the importance of sleep
  - Create a relaxing bedtime and sleeping environment (sing a lullaby, play music, offer stuffed animals, use nightlight)

*"The TV shows [that parents are watching] are up loud and I can't sleep because I hear them."*

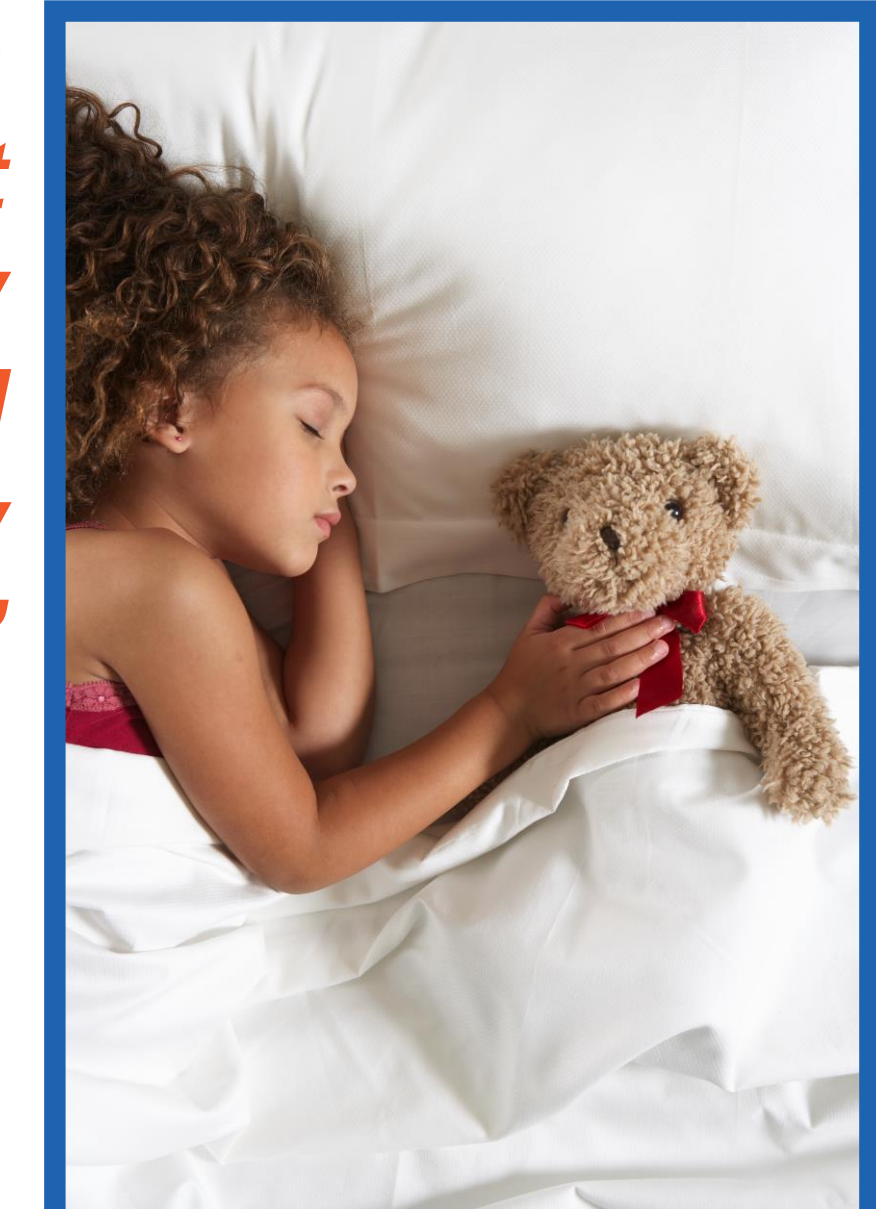


*"My mom says we have a bedtime so we aren't tired in school."*



*"Sometimes I want to watch a TV show and it keeps me up."*

*"[When I am scared at night], my stuffed animals really help me."*



## Strengths & Limitations

### Strengths

- Heterogeneous sample recruited in 3 unique geographic locations
- Focus group discussions were led by trained moderators using scripted moderator guides

### Weaknesses

- Focus groups led by different researchers in each state

*"Getting rid of distractions helps [me sleep]."*



## Conclusions

- Children are aware that sleep is important so that they are able to have energy to go about their days.
- Barriers to adequate sleep included noise, distraction (particularly electronics), and insecurity.
- Facilitators of adequate sleep include establishing bedtime routines, creating a calm distraction- and noise-free environment, and talking with children about the importance of sleep.
- Future nutrition education materials should help parents understand the links between sleep and weight and encourage them to establish a bedtime routine, create a relaxing sleep environment, have a set bedtime, and help them to overcome barriers that prevent kids from getting adequate sleep.