



# TEENS AND DIGITALLY- INTERRUPTED SLEEP

*By Walt Mueller*

## Introduction

Here at CPYU, one of our goals is to see young people flourish in life. This begins with pointing them to a restored relationship with their Creator. From there, we want to see them integrate their faith into every nook and cranny of their lives. The Gospel speaks to all of life and should lead us to live counter-cultural lives of worship which give glory to God (Romans 12:1&2). In recent years, we've seen the need to guide parents and teens into an understanding of what it means to glorify God in the ways in which we use the good gifts of technology and social media. One area of growing concern is how often we are engaged with our devices, sometimes at the cost of uninterrupted sleep.

## Digital Natives

For kids today (a.k.a digital natives), uninterrupted deep sleep is akin to pay phones, black and white TVs, transistor radios, and other obsolete remnants of their parents' "olden days." Researchers tell us that teenagers have always needed just over nine hours of uninterrupted sleep for healthy physical and emotional development. But judging from what the research is telling us about new patterns of adolescent sleep, healthy physical and emotional teenage development is in jeopardy of becoming a thing of the past. Teenage pressures and distractions are on the increase, while good old-fashioned uninterrupted sleep is on the decline.

Today's youth culture is a world filled with non-stop activities, very little downtime, increased pressure to achieve, and those ever-present smartphones and other digital devices. Because they want to stay connected and not miss anything, the great majority of teenagers now



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sleep with their smartphones (some research puts the number at 90%). Kids are waking at regular intervals to check texts and social media updates. And, even when they do nod off, the glow from electronic screens has been shown to suppress the production of melatonin, which aids healthy, deep sleep. Not only are our kids not getting the uninterrupted sleep that they need, but they wind-up spending their days under-performing and struggling to pay attention due to fatigue.

## Health Dangers

Healthcare professionals are sounding loud warnings regarding the dangers associated with digitally-interrupted sleep. These dangers include:

**Depression.** Counselors who screen patients for depression will oftentimes first ask patients about their sleep. Not getting enough sleep not only leads to depression, but will make it worse.

**Obesity.** People who don't sleep enough tend to crave and eat more food.

**Heart Disease.** A lack of sleep leads to greater stress, which in turn can elevate blood pressure and increase the risk of strokes and heart disease.

**Decreased neurologic function.** Not only does a lack of sleep lead to fatigue and decreased attention span, but it also effects driving and reaction time. Sleep impaired driving has been equated to driving while alcohol-impaired with a blood alcohol content of .08%.

**Aggressive and inappropriate behavior.** When you're tired, you tend to get grumpy.

Because we desire to teach our kids to glorify God in every nook and cranny of their lives, we must communicate these same warnings to our children and teens in the hope that we can convince them to "sleep counter-culturally," worshipping God through good stewardship of their bodies and rest.

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For additional information on the digital world of kids, visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding's Digital Kids Initiative at [digitalkidsinitiative.com](http://digitalkidsinitiative.com).

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