



# the family connection

News to use for families of young adolescents

Volume 13 Number 1

## Enough sleep?

Many 10- to 15-year-olds find it hard to get to sleep at night. Research isn't definitive yet as to why, but it seems to have a lot to do with the changing hormones in a young adolescent's body. It isn't that they aren't tired; it's just that they can't shut down their minds. They lie awake and worry, review unpleasant conversations, imagine "I'll show them" scenarios, listen to songs over and over in their heads, and toss and turn.

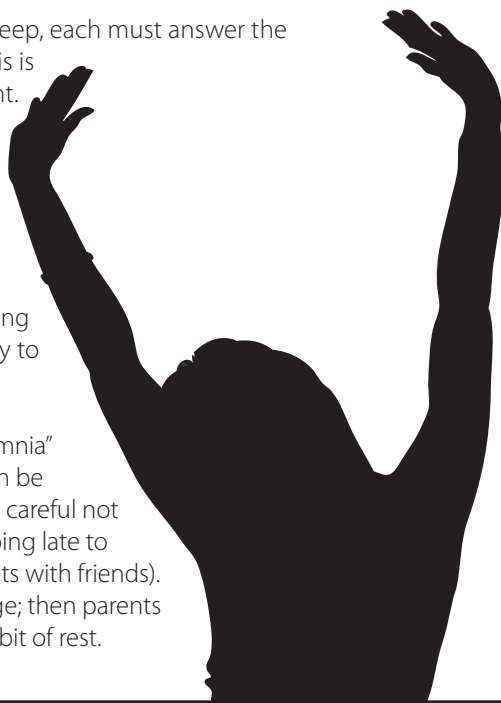
Some kids this age like to sleep with the radio on, with their earphones on, or in a room with something that makes "white noise" like a fan or humidifier or air conditioning unit. They use these devices to help shut out the noise in their heads so that they can get to sleep.

Others simply stay up. They read, watch TV, play games on their computers and—parents and guardians beware—talk on the phone, e-mail their friends, or surf the Internet.

While understanding that it takes a while to get sleepy, a good rule is no phone or computer after, say, 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. Communicating with friends or searching the Internet does not make kids drowsy or help them get to sleep. Instead, they stimulate the already-overloaded mind and make sleep even harder to come by.

No matter what time a child falls asleep, each must answer the morning wake up call for school. This is particularly painful after a short night. If your child has trouble falling asleep at night, let them know that this is normal for the age, so they don't add sleeplessness to their list of worries. Work with your child to find out what actually makes them sleepy (Hot shower? Warm milk? Being read to? Soft music playing?), and try to accommodate.

Like other traits of this age, this "insomnia" will pass and kids will survive. You can be sympathetic with their plight, but be careful not to make unnecessary allowances (going late to school, for instance, or late-night chats with friends). Sleep gets easier as young people age; then parents and guardians might also manage a bit of rest.



### WSUP?



Students with hand-held devices find it easy to text each other. The majority can text without looking, using their thumbs while holding their hands in their pockets! Why not sit with your child for a lesson? Be sure not to criticize, make fun, or overreact. Be grateful they are letting you in on their special language.

Here are some frequently-used messages that might be helpful to know.

AYT?	Are you there?
HUH?	Have you heard?
IYD	In your dreams
LY4E	Love you forever
NOYB	None of your business

*Watch for more in future issues of The Family Connection.*

### Factoids

87% of 12- to 17-year-olds are online daily

46% see e-mail as a way to communicate with adults, IM (instant messaging) is for everyday conversations with friends

27% of teens are online after 10 p.m.

*Pew Internet and Life Project*

# Never Fear, Volunteer

Middle grades teachers and administrators are often discouraged at the number of parents and guardians who just won't volunteer at their children's schools. Even parents who were regular volunteers in the elementary grades stay away once their child reaches grades six or seven. Some parents accept that their child simply doesn't want them at their school.

Here are ways to make your volunteer efforts more comfortable to you and your young adolescent:

- Be firm with your child about volunteering. Helping others is an important lesson for kids to learn.
- Volunteer in a different grade or in an area of the school away from your child's classrooms.
- If you do encounter your child, ignore him or her or greet him or her as you would any other child.
- Do not touch or joke with your child, as this causes embarrassment.
- If you chaperone a social event with your child present, just follow the above rules.



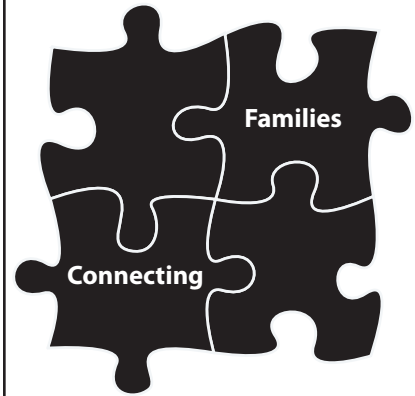
## You were wondering...

*My child insists on wearing the latest trends in clothes, sometimes even specific labels. Should I give in to this?*

Middle schoolers (and even younger kids) urgently want to be part of the crowd. Wearing the "right" thing is very important, that's why you shouldn't spend the whole new-clothes-for-school budget before school starts. Instead, wait to see what's "in" that year. Inexpensive stores offer the same trendy clothes as the upscale stores. Even thrift stores have up-to-date clothing for kids.

If your child insists on a particular label that is expensive, try this: let him know the entire amount budgeted for new school clothes. If he chooses the one "label" item and that is the whole budget, then that is all for the year. Be sure you stick to it!

By the way, adults are often the cause for our children wanting the trendy clothes and latest fashion item. When they were younger we dressed them up and told them how great they looked in their new little outfits. Now that they are older, they want the same admiration, but from their peers, and with outfits that are more costly.



Perhaps you already have a tradition of measuring your child on a door or wall someplace in the house. If not, the middle grades is a good time to start because it's amazing how much kids grow during this time.

Here's an idea: Take a long piece of string and use it to measure your child, snipping it off at the child's exact height. Put the string in an envelope with the child's name on it and put it away. Bring it out at the end of the school year. It's an immediate visual that shows how much they've grown and it's a good conversation piece about the past year.



*The Family Connection* is published by National Middle School Association as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. NMSA is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students—youth ages 10 to 15. Membership in NMSA is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in NMSA's membership. Call 1-800-528-NMSA to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

**About the Editor:** Judith Baenen, a former classroom teacher, speaks and writes about middle grades students and the issues that affect them. She is author of National Middle School Association's pamphlets for families of middle grades students *HELP* and *More HELP*.