

Sleep and academic performance go hand in hand

BY METRO CREATIVE
Students and sleep are not always compatible. College students have long expressed a tendency to be night owls, but even school-aged youngsters may be reluctant to go to bed on time during the school year.
Parents of school-aged children know that bedtime can be challenging, particularly when moms and dads want to ensure their youngsters get the recommended number of hours of sleep each night. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine advises school-aged

children between the ages of six and 12 get nine to 12 hours of sleep per night, while teens are urged to sleep eight to 10 hours per night. Studies have found that when students don't get enough sleep on school nights, their academic performance is likely to suffer. A 2023 study of first-year college students led by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that negative outcomes began to accumulate when students received less than six hours of sleep per night. Authors of the

study noted that previous studies in animals showed that memories formed during the day were consolidated while animals slept but forgotten when those animals' normal sleep patterns were interrupted. The researchers behind the study identified a notable decline in students' grade point averages when they received less than six hours of sleep, suggesting humans' ability to learn and remember what they've learned in a given day is compromised if they don't get enough sleep that night.
School-aged youngsters typically get more than six hours

of sleep per night, but if they're falling short of AASM recommendations, those students' academic performance could be adversely affected. With that in mind, parents can try various strategies to get children to bed on time.
• Stay consistent with bedtime. A firm bedtime can reduce the likelihood that sleep disruptions will affect how children perform in the classroom. If children are staying up three hours past their weeknight bedtime on Friday and Saturday, then they're less likely to want to go to bed on time on school

nights. A little flexibility on the weekends might not upset the apple cart, but try to maintain a consistent bedtime throughout the week.
• Help kids calm down before bed. A winding down period leading up to bedtime can help kids fall asleep more quickly and might even make them less resistant to bedtime. Avoid particularly energetic activities directly before bedtime. Calmly reading a book and picking clothes out for the next day of school are calm activities that can get kids' bodies ready for sleep.

Teens say they are turning to AI for friendship

BY JOCELYN GECKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS
No question is too small when Kayla Chege, a high school student in Kansas, is using artificial intelligence.
The 15-year-old asks ChatGPT for guidance on back-to-school shopping, makeup colors, low-calorie choices at Smoothie King, plus ideas for her Sweet 16 and her younger sister's birthday party.
The sophomore honors student makes a point not to have chatbots do her homework and tries to limit her interactions to mundane questions. But in interviews with The Associated Press and a new study, teenagers say they are increasingly interacting with AI as if it were a companion, capable of providing advice and friendship.
"Everyone uses AI for everything now. It's really taking over," said Chege, who wonders how AI tools will affect her generation. "I think kids use AI to get out of thinking."
For the past couple of years, concerns about cheating at school have dominated the conversation around kids and AI. But artificial intelligence is playing a much larger role in many of their lives. AI, teens say, has become a go-to source for personal advice, emotional support, everyday decision-making and problem-solving.

'AI IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE. IT NEVER GETS BORED WITH YOU'
More than 70% of teens have used AI companions and half use them regularly, according to a new study from Common Sense Media, a group that studies and advocates for using screens and digital media sensibly.
The study defines AI companions as platforms designed to serve as "digital friends," like Character. AI or Replika, which can be customized with specific traits or personalities and can offer emotional support, companionship and conversations that can feel human-like. But popular sites like ChatGPT and Claude, which mainly answer questions, are being used in the same way, the researchers say.
As the technology rapidly gets more sophisticated, teenagers and experts worry about AI's potential to redefine human relationships and exacerbate crises of loneliness and



Bruce Perry, 17, demonstrates the possibilities of artificial intelligence July 15 by creating an AI companion on Character AI in Russellville, Ark.

youth mental health.
"AI is always available. It never gets bored with you. It's never judgmental," says Ganesh Nair, an 18-year-old in Arkansas. "When you're talking to AI, you are always right. You're always interesting. You are always emotionally justified."
All that used to be appealing, but as Nair heads to college this fall, he wants to step back from using AI. Nair got spooked after a high school friend who relied on an "AI companion" for heart-to-heart conversations with his girlfriend later had the chatbot write the breakup text ending his two-year relationship.
"That felt a little bit dystopian, that a computer generated the end to a real relationship," said Nair. "It's almost like we are allowing computers to replace our relationships with people."

HOW MANY TEENS ARE USING AI? NEW STUDY STUNS RESEARCHERS
In the Common Sense Media survey, 31% of teens said their conversations with AI companions were "as satisfying or more satisfying" than talking with real friends. Even though half of teens said they distrust AI's advice, 33% had discussed serious or important issues with AI instead of real people.
Those findings are worrisome, says

Michael Robb, the study's lead author and head researcher at Common Sense, and should send a warning to parents, teachers and policymakers. The now-booming and largely unregulated AI industry is becoming as integrated with adolescence as smartphones and social media are.
"It's eye-opening," said Robb. "When we set out to do this survey, we had no understanding of how many kids are actually using AI companions." The study polled more than 1,000 teens nationwide in April and May.
Adolescence is a critical time for developing identity, social skills and independence, Robb said, and AI companions should complement — not replace — real-world interactions.
"If teens are developing social skills on AI platforms where they are constantly being validated, not being challenged, not learning to read social cues or understand somebody else's perspective, they are not going to be adequately prepared in the real world," he said.
The nonprofit analyzed several popular AI companions in a "risk assessment," finding ineffective age restrictions and that the platforms can produce sexual material, give dangerous advice and offer harmful content. The group recommends that minors not use AI companions.

A CONCERNING TREND TO TEENS AND ADULTS ALIKE
Researchers and educators worry about the cognitive costs for youth who rely heavily on AI, especially in their creativity, critical thinking and social skills. The potential dangers of children forming relationships with chatbots gained national attention last year when a 14-year-old Florida boy died by suicide after developing an emotional attachment to a Character. AI chatbot.
"Parents really have no idea this is happening," said Eva Telzer, a psychology and neuroscience professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "All of us are struck by how quickly this blew up." Telzer is leading multiple studies on youth and AI, a new research area with limited data.
Telzer's research has found that children as young as 8 are using generative AI and also found that teens are using AI to explore their sexuality and for companionship. In focus groups, Telzer found that one of the top apps teens frequent is SpicyChat AI, a free role-playing app intended for adults.
Many teens also say they use chatbots to write emails or messages to strike the right tone in sensitive situations.
"One of the concerns that comes up is that they no longer have trust in themselves to make a decision," said Telzer. "They need feedback from AI before feeling like they can check off the box that an idea is OK or not."
Arkansas teen Bruce Perry, 17, says he relates to that and relies on AI tools to craft outlines and proofread essays for his English class.
"If you tell me to plan out an essay, I would think of going to ChatGPT before getting out a pencil," Perry said. He uses AI daily and has asked chatbots for advice in social situations, to help him decide what to wear and to write emails to teachers, saying AI articulates his thoughts faster.
Perry says he feels fortunate that AI companions were not around when he was younger.
"I'm worried that kids could get lost in this," Perry said. "I could see a kid that grows up with AI not seeing a reason to go to the park or try to make a friend."
Other teens agree, saying the issues with AI and its effect on children's mental health are different from those of social media.

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