

# Parent Power

Transforming the health  
& wellbeing of our children



PLANET  
Youth®

PARTNER Wicklow

**Guidelines for Parents of  
National School Children**

# About Planet Youth Wicklow

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**Planet Youth is an evidence-based primary prevention project that provides us with the opportunity to improve long-term health and life outcomes for our children.**

In November 2024, we surveyed 15 and 16 year olds in participating schools in Wicklow, and this gives us the information we need to make positive changes for the younger children coming behind them.

This booklet has been developed to bring some of that information to parents who have children in national school, and to introduce the idea of parents working together more, in order to improve outcomes for all of our children.

Having good routines in place from a young age will pay off quickly, and in the years ahead will make for happier, healthier children, teenagers and young adults. We hope you find the booklet useful.

## The November 2024 survey of 925 of our teenagers told us that:

**89%**

said it's easy to get caring and warmth from parents

**78%**

said it's easy to get advice on personal matters from parents

**55%**

are not getting enough sleep

**80%**

have a phone in their bedroom at night

**64%**

spend three hours or more on social media every day

**39%**

got their first smartphone at 11 or younger

**73%**

reported good physical health

**13%**

never do physical activity

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# Family Time

Our time is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children and setting time aside each day creates the opportunity and space to chat with them and listen to what they have to say.

Here are just a few good reasons why that is so important.

**It strengthens family bonds**

**It improves communication**

**It builds children's self-esteem**

**It develops positive behaviours**

**It can help your child to do better in school**





## Connecting

Throughout their lives, it is important that we connect with our children. Building time into each day to really listen to and notice them lets us show them that their experiences and feelings are acknowledged and understood.

Stepping into their shoes to try and see the world as they see it is a great way to do this.



### Some things to do together

Doing things together doesn't have to mean spending money, some of the simplest things are the best.



Regular family meals



Take an interest in their friends and schoolwork



Play together, try traditional board games



Make a regular family night



Try out new hobbies and sports



When times are busy, use a car ride to talk

How are we doing?

What are we doing well?

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What would we like to do better?

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Have a conversation together about this



For more information on Family time, explore: [parentpower.planetyouth.ie](https://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)

# Sleep and Bedtimes



Children who have regular and good quality sleep have improved attention, behaviour, learning, memory, and better mental and physical health.

From 6-12 years old, children typically need 9-12 hours of sleep each night and although each child is different, a good guide would be to move their bedtime up 15 minutes each school year.



How much **sleep** does my child need?

AGE GROUP  
**3 - 5 Years**



per 24 hour  
period

AGE GROUP  
**6 - 12 Years**



per 24 hour  
period





## Guideline bedtimes

Junior infants: 7.15pm

Senior infants 7.30pm

1st class 7.45pm

2nd class 8.00pm

3rd class 8.15pm

4th class 8.30pm

5th class 8.45pm

6th class 9.00pm



## Relaxing before bed

Reduce screen time and sugary foods and drinks in the hours leading up to bedtime. You can help your child settle and relax for sleep by keeping activities quiet in the hour before bed. For example, you could play gentle music or read a story together. Making a bath part of your child's bedtime routine can also help with relaxation.



## Bedtime routine

A bedtime routine is very important at this age.

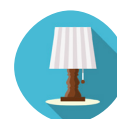
For example, a child who normally goes to bed at 7.30pm might have a bedtime routine that looks like this:



**6.45 pm:**  
put on pyjamas,  
brush teeth,  
go to the toilet.



**7.15 pm:**  
quiet time in the  
bedroom with a book  
and a bedtime story  
or quiet chat.



**7.30 pm:**  
goodnight  
and lights out.

## How are we doing?

What are we doing well? .....

What would we like to do better? .....



Have a  
conversation  
together  
about this



For more information on  
sleep, explore:  
[parentpower.planetyouth.ie](http://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)

# Screen Time



Our young people report spending a lot of time on screens. Our children are also getting access to smartphones at younger ages.

This is a serious concern. The evidence tells us that when children spend a lot of time on screens, it harms many important aspects of their development. Things like their sleep, their mental health and physical health, their learning and their social skills can all be impacted, amongst many others factors.

Screens have become part of family life now however. They are used for staying connected, for entertainment, sometimes for home and schoolwork. As parents we need to find a way to accommodate them and find a balance that works.

What is important is that screens don't overtake family life or prevent us from being physically active during the day. The less time that children spend on screens, the better their long-term health outcomes are likely to be.



# Top Screen Time Tips For Parents



## 1. Rules

Agree on a clear set of rules in your home about screen use and screen time.



## 2. Screen Free Zone

Having no screens in bedrooms is best.



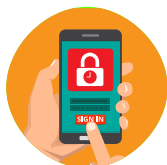
## 3. Handing up screens

It's good to have the routine established of handing over screens every evening at a set time.



## 4. Join In

Watch screen content with your child or play their favourite game together. They can learn how to behave online while interacting with you.



## 5. Make use of apps

There are useful apps available to monitor and limit screen use and downloads. Avail of these and understand internet safety.



## 6. Digital Detox

One evening a week try a family digital detox and plan an activity together.



## 7. Lead By Example

Your own actions are the most powerful way you can influence your child's behaviour. Be mindful of your own screen use.

How are we doing?

What are we doing well?

What would we like to do better?



Have a conversation together about this



For more information on Screen time, explore: [parentpower.planetyouth.ie](http://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)



# Sports and Hobbies

All children should be active, at a moderate to vigorous level, for at least 60 minutes every day, and for muscle strengthening, flexibility and bone strengthening exercises three times a week is recommended.

That may sound a lot, but little things add up and have a big overall effect.



## Getting active



Make activity part of the routine, like household jobs, walking after dinner or walking to and from school.



Be active together. It'll get you moving, and children love to play with their parents.



Have some simple games and sports equipment around. Balls and skipping ropes can keep children busy for hours.



Allow time for play. Children can burn more calories and have more fun when left to their own devices.

### How are we doing?

What are we doing well? .....

What would we like to do better? .....



Have a conversation together about this

## Trying something new



Hobbies and sports are rewarding and enriching parts of all our lives, so encourage your child to explore their interests.

They'll learn new skills and make new friends, build confidence, and discover themselves more.

Maybe you could try out new hobbies or sports together.



For more information on Sports & Hobbies explore: [parentpower.planetyouth.ie](http://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)

# Making Changes at Home



If there are new things you'd like to introduce, or changes you'd like to make, here are some steps to think about.





## Six steps towards change



### 1. Keep it simple

Instead of trying to change lots of things at once, pick one thing you want to work on first.



### 2. Involve everybody

Sit together and come up with a plan on any change you would like to make as a family.



### 3. Set goals and write them down

Start small as you can build on these first steps over time.



### 4. Expect some resistance

Your child may not like new rules or things being different and may test boundaries. Understand that this is normal.



### 5. Give yourself a chance

Changes take time so be patient and don't get discouraged. Keep going.



### 6. Look for support

Making changes can be difficult, so look for help. A sibling or a friend can give you suggestions and provide support to help you succeed. Other parents are also a great resource.

“Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life.”



For more information on  
**Making Changes at Home** explore:  
[parentpower.planetyouth.ie](http://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)

# Parents Working Together



The support of other parents is really valuable.

Try to get to know the other parents in your child's class. Knowing the other parents, networking and attending school events are all important and a well known protective factor for our children.

Good parent networks are also an effective way to support children's learning, development and wellbeing.



## Your class at school

Parents can achieve a huge amount by getting together and working out shared expectations and boundaries.

### Some issues that parents can work together and agree on are:



Birthday parties and presents



Screen time



Age appropriate games



Communications



Bullying



Mobile phones

And so on, it's up to you to decide...

## NEXT STEPS

There is an opportunity for class groups of parents to develop this idea a bit further.

By working together, parents can come to a consensus and develop agreements on issues that affect their children.

If, as a parent, or as a principal or teacher, you feel this is something that your class or school would like to work on together, then visit the Parent Power section of the Planet Youth website for more information. You can also get in touch directly by email at [www.wicklow.planetyouth.ie](mailto:www.wicklow.planetyouth.ie)



[parentpower.planetyouth.ie](http://parentpower.planetyouth.ie)



[www.wicklow.planetyouth.ie](http://www.wicklow.planetyouth.ie)

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of parents.”

