

SELF-RELIANT WELLNESS • MIND & BODY SELF-CARE

# BACK-TO-SCHOOL SLEEP RESET

*A quick reference for parents — shifting your child's body clock before day one*

## STEP 1 • COUNT BACKWARD FROM DAY ONE

| AGE GROUP             | START THE RESET   | SLEEP NEEDED | WHAT MAKES THIS AGE HARD                                                                                |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Elementary (5–10)     | 10–14 days before | 9–12 hours   | Bedtime stalling gets rewarded by extra attention. Deep sleep is heavy — hard to wake. Watch late naps. |
| Middle school (11–13) | 2–3 weeks before  | 9–10 hours   | Puberty starts pushing the clock later. Phones arrive — set the charge-outside-the-bedroom rule now.    |
| High school (14–18)   | 3–4 weeks before  | 8–10 hours   | Body clock runs 1.5–3 hrs later — real biology, not laziness. Watch caffeine and drowsy driving.        |

**DO THE MATH:** School wake time → count back the hours needed = target bedtime. Compare that to where they sleep now. Move the gap **15 minutes earlier every 2 nights**. 2-hour gap ≈ 16 days. 3-hour gap ≈ 24 days. Short on time? Use 30-minute jumps nightly — a partial shift beats none.

## STEP 2 • THE DAILY RULES

| EVERY MORNING                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | EVERY EVENING                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Light within 30 min of waking.</b> Outside, 15–30 min. This is the engine of the whole plan.</li> <li>▪ <b>Move WAKE time first.</b> Bedtime follows on its own — don't force an early bedtime.</li> <li>▪ <b>Same wake time 7 days a week.</b> Weekend sleep-in capped at 1 hour.</li> <li>▪ <b>Hydrate before you feed.</b> Water first, then something small and protein-based.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Dim the house 2 hrs before bed.</b> Lamps, not overheads. Protects melatonin.</li> <li>▪ <b>Screens off 60 min before bed.</b> Charging outside the bedroom.</li> <li>▪ <b>Bed is for sleep only.</b> Homework at a desk, reading in a chair — never in bed.</li> <li>▪ <b>Caffeine cutoff by early afternoon.</b> Room cool (65–68°F), dark, quiet. Warm bath ~1 hr before helps.</li> </ul> |

## STEP 3 • SURVIVING THE WAKE-UP

| WHY MORNINGS BLOW UP                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | THE 60-SECOND MORNING SCRIPT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>They wake up already flooded.</b> Cortisol — the alertness AND stress hormone — surges right before waking. Yelling stacks stress on a system already peaking.</li> <li>▪ <b>The fog is real.</b> Sleep inertia, that heavy grogginess after deep sleep, is normal physiology — not defiance. Wake them gradually.</li> <li>▪ <b>They won't be hungry.</b> That same surge shuts down appetite. "I'm not hungry" is usually true. Give it 20–30 extra minutes.</li> <li>▪ <b>Their thinking brain isn't on yet.</b> The reasoning part of the brain is the LAST to wake up. The emotional part is already awake.</li> </ul> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Connect first.</b> Sit on the bed. Hand on the shoulder. Ten quiet seconds before any words.</li> <li>2. <b>Open with warmth, not a demand.</b> "Morning, bud." "Rough one, huh?" "I hate this part too."</li> <li>3. <b>Name it.</b> "Your body still thinks it's the middle of the night. That's real."</li> <li>4. <b>Then redirect — no apology.</b> "Feet on the floor. I'll get the blinds. Shower's yours." The limit does not move.</li> <li>5. <b>Use light instead of volume.</b> Open the blinds. Light does the actual waking — and carries no sting.</li> <li>6. <b>Save the hard talk for Saturday.</b> Not at 6:50 a.m., when neither of you can reason well.</li> </ol> |

**TALK TO YOUR PEDIATRICIAN OR A SLEEP SPECIALIST IF:** Snoring, gasping, or pauses in breathing (in kids this often looks like hyperactivity or inattention, not sleepiness) • Still can't fall asleep before 1–2 a.m. on a steady schedule • Very sleepy all day despite enough hours • Sleep trouble alongside ongoing sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, or withdrawal • Bedtime battles that aren't improving after 3 weeks of a consistent routine.

Go deeper into how sleep works — and download the full planner: [Sleep Planner Tool → utah23.org/2026/05/27/sleep\\_plan](https://utah23.org/2026/05/27/sleep_plan)

Sources: Owens et al. (2014) • Wheaton et al. (2018) • Carskadon & Dement (2017) • Czeisler & Buxton (2017) • Bootzin & Perlis (1992) • Clow et al. (2010) • Chang et al. (2015) • Hirshkowitz et al. (2015) • Siegel & Bryson (2014)