

Sleep study helps with teaching during pandemic times

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As frequently reported, especially in recent months, schools are essential to the mental health of children and youth. As a school-based psychologist for the past 19 years with the Tri-County RCE, I wholeheartedly believe that schools are crucial environments to educate students about how their brains develop, learn, and regulate. Your school-based psychologist has a unique set of skills that goes far beyond providing assessment results. We can support students in gaining the awareness they need, from a young age, to learn all the amazing ways their brains work, and the power of how essential relationships are to their optimal functioning. As a committed life-long learner, I also uphold the fundamental function of our role as school-based psychologists, which is to advocate for students and spotlight their voices in all we do.

We also have a crucial role to play in supporting our teaching colleagues' mental health and wellness. To that end, I applied for an NSTU Group Insurance Trustees Mental Health and Wellness Grant. After being awarded the grant, the Yarmouth Local of the NSTU was invited

The goal of the challenge was to offer an opportunity to get very intentional about the quantity and quality of sleep. This school year began with members feeling 'June-tired' in September. Despite this sense of collective exhaustion, members were tasked with not only re-engaging students who had their previous academic year impacted, but also to soldier-on despite struggling with impacted personal lives (i.e., loss, continued and on-going racial oppression, grief, etc.).

Offering a self-compassion challenge to intentionally explore sleep practices was a solution-focused option for Yarmouth Local members. The 30-Day challenge began with a short video outlining the role sleep plays in our daily functioning and subsequently, each week of the challenge, members were encouraged to examine a different aspect of how their daily functioning impacts their sleep quantity and quality.

From exploring the characteristics of their sleep-environment, to introducing various aspects of mindfulness, being intentional with exercise, examining the impact of dietary choices, and reducing the role of technology before sleep, members had the opportunity to introduce small

changes in their routines that could have big benefits in the quantity and quality of their sleep.

Although the number of participants in the challenge was limited-and the number completing the challenge was even smaller -improvements were noted in multiple areas surveyed, i.e., functioning through the day as well as quantity of sleep at night. Several members felt they learned new things about their sleep-hygiene as well as some take-aways for improving their ability to initially fall asleep. Each member that completed all aspects of the 30-Day Challenge (including the final survey) were provided with an array of carefully selected items to complement their continued self-compassion journey towards a better night's sleep.

I am happy to share the supported resources that helped members of the Yarmouth Local engage with the 30-Day Sleep Challenge. I hope that the following resources and links to the accompanying videos will assist other Locals and members in improving the quantity and quality of sleep. If you want to reach out please contact me at neyorke@nstu.ca.



Through the Mental Health and Wellness Grant, the NSTU Group Insurance Trustees with support from Johnson Incorporated fund projects that support the mental health and well-being of children and youth in the schools across Nova Scotia, programs in classrooms, schools or communities for children and youth.

To be eligible, the individual must have a permanent, probationary, or term contract and be a member of the NSTU or PSAANS at the time of application. The NSTU Group Insurance Trustees awards grants valued at up to \$600 once per year. The criteria includes the project description, innovation and creativity, impacts on students, materials and budget and overall impression. The next application deadline is October 30, 2021. For more information visit: <https://nstuinsurance.ca/grants/the-mental-health-and-wellness-grant/>

Getting Intentional about Sleep Environments:

Apps for supporting Sleep-Tracking: Sleep Cycle

Wearable-tech Apps for tracking sleep: Fitbit – free (Fitbit), Pillow – free (Apple Watch), Apple Health (iPhone)

How Mindfulness Improves Sleep:

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/mindfulness-and-sleep-2.html>

Apps offering Guided Meditation and Sleep-related calming strategies:

- Insight Timer (free and subscription options)
- Calm
- Aura
- Relax Melodies: Sleep Sounds

The Benefits of Exercise on sleep:

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/exercising-for-better-sleep>

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/nutrition/food-and-drink-promote-good-nights-sleep>

Apps:

- Participaction (Free! Chalk FULL of awesome, evidenced-based information Hal Johnson and Joanne MacLeod in app form!)
- My Fitness Pal (Free! No wearable tech required. Daily tracking of your food/ beverage/ snack intake, great info for recipes and exercises, competition options)

Reduce Tech Use at Bedtime:

<https://www.wellandgood.com/working-in-your-bedroom/>

<https://www.becomingminimalist.com/technology-free-bedroom/>

Apps

- Utilize the 'Night Shift' feature on your smart phone, tablet, or e-reader to reduce the amount of melatonin suppressing blue light being emitted from the screen. Night Shift can be set manually or in advance of the evening hours. It works by switching the light within the screen of the device to a warmer spectrum of light. (Some android devices label this feature the 'anti-blue light' or 'blue light filter') The scientific data regarding these blue-light filters is inconclusive and the best option continues to be turning the device off for a minimum of 30 minutes prior to bedtime to ensure a reduction in light (in general) into the eyes.
- Think outside the box about alarms. Instead of setting your 'Wake Up' alarm only, set a 'Turn Off' or 'Wind Down' alarm in the evenings. This should be set approximately 30 minutes before you intend to be in bed.

The following video links were provided to members of the Yarmouth Local to assist during their Sleep Challenge:

Intro: <https://www.wevideo.com/view/2227527488>

Week 1: <https://www.wevideo.com/view/2074483727>

Week 2: <https://www.wevideo.com/view/2084145426>

Week 3: <https://www.wevideo.com/view/2096161624>

Week 4: <https://www.wevideo.com/view/2106114152>

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