

What you can do about Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS)

Concept #1 Someone who does not see a problem will never fix that problem.

Concept #2 The problem with DSPS is *scheduling*. To fix it requires a consistent schedule.

A. Discuss the problem:

Talk to your teen about why being unable to get up or being unable to be alert in the morning is a problem. Listen to their viewpoint. If they don't agree there is a problem, you won't succeed in changing their sleep pattern.

B. When to get them up:

Negotiate a reasonable time to get up *EVERY* day, (e.g. 8 am) and then get them up by that time *EVERY day including weekends*. No mercy. No option. No exceptions. You **MUST** do this. *If you cannot convince your teen to do this step, give up.*

C. How to get them up:

1. Use a timer to turn on a **VERY bright light** in the bedroom ~60 minutes before the scheduled wake up time. It is **NOT** to be turned off until the person is up to stay.
2. Use another timer to put on a **loud radio** 5 minutes before the scheduled wake up.
3. Go into the bedroom and get them up at the wake up time.
4. Have a reasonable reward for following the plan, and real consequences for not following the plan.

e.g. sleep in one day = chores...
sleep in another day = more chores plus loss of privileges
get out of bed by the set hour for 2 steady weeks = a reward
get out of bed by the set hour every day for 6 weeks = a larger reward.

You **must** negotiate the rewards and penalties that will apply. Make them reasonable, but put them in writing **with a signature** from your teenager.

D. When to go to bed:

They should not go to bed until they are sleepy, **BUT** they **MUST** get up by the scheduled time no matter when they fall asleep.

E. Can they nap?

It isn't a good idea. If they are *very* sleepy in the day, they may lie down for a maximum of 30 minutes after 1 pm and before 7 pm.

F. What should they do (or not do) to help?

- They should not have a television in their bedroom.
- They should not watch TV, talk on the phone, do homework, etc. in bed
- They should not be in bed except to sleep.
- They must have a reasonable curfew on weekends. The commonest reason delayed sleep phase patterns persist is that the teenager is up late on weekend nights and sleeps in on weekend days.
- Avoiding caffeine after noon helps.
- Outdoor exercise immediately after getting up helps.

G. What about drug therapy?

Medications may help in some situations, but cannot replace any of the above.

H. How long does this all take?

It takes at least 3 **uninterrupted weeks** of a consistent schedule to see improvement. There are no shortcuts. Without specific therapy the problem goes away by age ~25.