

RUDE AWAKENING

Something weird is going on in my house at bedtime: my children now go to bed later than I do.

Nothing, as far as I can tell, has changed for my husband and me. We are clearly aware of nightfall and, if for some reason we cannot see outside, we can tell by the hands on the clock when it's time to call it a day. Simple enough. Our children, however, have lost all ability to sense and/or plan for impending slumber. When I have hit the stage when I need to prop my eyelids open with toothpicks and my speech is slurring (approximately 9:30 p.m. most nights) the two teens in my house are just firing up their computers, calling their friends and opening the fridge for round two of the feeding frenzies that occur nightly. When I am flipping a coin to see if I will bother with the ten minutes it takes to properly cleanse, hydrate and moisturize my face before bed or take a short cut by slap-dashing some warm water in the general vicinity of my face as I walk by the sink, they are just starting their homework. By the time I've changed into my pajamas and unearthed my slippers from the dog's stash of treasures under the bed, they are flipping on the TV to find the sports report. My husband will be snoring (despite the fact that he'll tell you he was really watching the Golf Channel. With his eyes closed.) when the kids are just cranking up their tunes on their ipods.

I know this is some kind of milestone in child-rearing, but I'm not sure how to take it. What is the explanation for such a turn of events?? Not so long ago, I was rocking these two babies to sleep at a mercifully early time such as 8:00 p.m., leaving me with at least two golden hours to pick up the house or watch a TV show that didn't feature a giggly muppet or an oversized purple dinosaur. In grade school, their bedtime was still a reasonable 9:00. Now, at 11:00 we can hear the shower running and the computer dinging when their friends log in to talk. They're revving up when we're winding down and I have to say, this disparity of our sleep cycles is getting a tad annoying.

They tell me they can't help it. It must be those wild and wonderful teenage hormones, or a growth spurt, or a caffeine jag, but they're just too wired to go to bed at a decent time. Instead of being concerned about this teenage phenomenon, perhaps I should learn to take advantage of their extended energy and assign chores to be completed while they're still up. One could do dishes, one could do laundry and they both could let the dog out. And in. And back out. And back in. Think of all the work that could be done while I peacefully sleep! It would be like having the shoemaker's elves at my beck and call. I think I'll start implementing this new concept tonight.

I have a feeling that by tomorrow night, their insomnia will be cured.

Mary Beth Weisenburger lives in Putnam County with her husband and two wide-awake teenagers.