



# RIDGEWAY COLLEGE

## NEWSLETTER



27 January 2023

*Dear Parents*

We all had a very early start to the day today. Many of our children and staff were up at 04:00 or earlier to get ready to make their way to Ridgeway to depart for our Independent Schools' Athletics at Tom Naude in Polokwane. Towards the end of the school day yesterday, I found myself encouraging many of our young adults to have an early night in preparation for a long day ahead.

After our children had finished their athletics practice, I found myself wondering about how many of our children seldom have an 'early night' during the week. How many were burning the midnight oil due to homework or cellphone chatter. I came across the article included below, it makes for an interesting perspective.

**Is your teen a night owl?**

Your teen's sleep patterns could shape their brain and behaviours years later.

Researchers Rebecca Cooper, Maria Di Biase and Vanessa Cropley write that it is not all bad news.

It is 11 pm on a weeknight and your teenager still has their bedroom light on. You want them to get enough sleep for school the next day, but it is a struggle.

New research shows what happens to the brains and behaviour of young teenagers, years after they've become 'night owls'.

We found this shift in sleep pattern increased the risk of having behavioural problems and delayed brain development in later adolescence.

But it's not all bad news for night owls.

**Sleep habits shift**

People's sleep patterns shift during their teenage years. Teens can stay awake longer, fall asleep later, and have a lie in the next day.

Many teens also shift from being a morning lark to a night owl. They feel more productive and alert later in the evening, preferring to go to sleep later, and waking up later the next day.

This shift towards 'eveningness' can clash with teens' school and work. A chronic lack of sleep, due to these mis-matched sleep schedules, can explain why teens who are night owls are at greater risk for emotional and behavioural problems than ones who are morning larks.

Emerging research also indicates morning larks and night owls have a different brain structure. This includes differences in both the grey and white matter, which have been linked to differences in memory, emotional wellbeing, attention and empathy. Despite these links, it's unclear how this relationship might emerge. Does being a night owl increase the risk for later emotional and behavioural problems? Or do emotional and behavioural problems lead to someone becoming more of a night owl?

#BELIEVE

Teens who shifted to becoming a night owl in early adolescence (around the age of 12-13) were more likely to have behavioural problems several years later. This included greater aggression, rule breaking, and antisocial behaviours.

But they weren't at increased risk of emotional problems, such as anxiety or low mood.

Importantly, this relationship did not occur in the reverse direction. In other words, we found that earlier emotional and behavioural problems didn't influence whether a teenager became more of a morning lark or night owl in late adolescence. Research also showed that teens who shifted to becoming a night owl had a different rate of brain development than teens who remained morning larks.

We found the white matter of night owls didn't increase to the same degree as teens who were morning larks. We know growth of white matter is important in the teenage years to support cognitive, emotional and behavioural development.

Importantly, research shows that becoming a night owl increases the risk of experiencing behavioural problems and delayed brain development in later adolescence, rather than the other way round.

These findings highlight the importance of focusing on teens' sleep-wake habits early in adolescence to support their later emotional and behavioural health. We know getting enough sleep is extremely important for both mental and brain health.

### IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS FOR NIGHT OWLS.

As research shows, morning lark and night owl preferences aren't set in stone. Research indicates we can modify our sleep preferences and habits.

For example, exposure to light (even artificial light) alters our circadian rhythms, which can influence our sleep preferences. So minimising late-night exposure to bright lights and screens (including cellphones) can be one way to modify our preferences and drive for sleep.

Exposure to light first thing in the morning can also help shift our internal clocks to a more morning-oriented rhythm. You could encourage your teen to have their breakfast outside, or go onto a balcony or into the garden before heading to school or work.

#### *About the authors*

Rebecca Cooper is a PhD candidate in neuropsychiatry at The University of Melbourne.

Maria Di Biase is a Senior Research Fellow, Psychiatry at The University of Melbourne.

Vanessa Cropley is a Senior Research Fellow at The University of Melbourne.



## INTER-HIGH ATHLETICS

We were off on the road early this morning for Polokwane. Our children are 'sleepy' but in high spirits. I trust that we will have an enjoyable day and bring home more than a few medals. Best of luck to our athletes and thanks to our supporters – your cheering is a source of tremendous encouragement for our athletes.

## INTER-HOUSE ATHLETICS

We had a great day on Tuesday at Louis Trichardt High School for our Inter-House Athletics meeting. We have some amazing young athletes at Ridgeway and many new faces with tremendous potential have joined us this year. We look forward to announcing the winning 'house' at assembly on Tuesday.



## GRADE 8 & 12 EVENING

The change in date for the Inter-High has forced us to move the date for our Grade 8 & 12 Evening to Friday 10th February. Further details will be communicated in due course.

## GOOD-BYE TO EMAILS

This will be the last emailed newsletter. As of next week our communication will be pushed to the D6 School Communicator App. If you still have not downloaded the app yet, please do.

If any parents are struggling to access or navigate the app, please contact the school for support. Alternately, our children are pretty 'tech savvy' and are sure to be able to assist.

## UNIFORMS

Please could I ask parents to assist us with the school uniforms. A number of our children are beginning to wear white socks to school, taper their school trousers or conveniently 'forget' their school tie and/or blazer. We have a very smart uniform and it is an important visual form of branding for our school.

## FIELD TRIPS

Please be reminded that the 2nd instalment for the field trip payments is due 4 February. We need to confirm bookings and make deposit payment to service providers for these trips. As such, we need 1st and 2nd instalments paid up to date by 4 February otherwise we will not be able to book a place on the trip for your child.

If there are any challenges, please contact Ms. Waller (Head of Operations) as soon as possible.

To all our parents and our exhausted children, have a super weekend.

KIND REGARDS

*Dr. G.W Elliott*

EXECUTIVE HEAD

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#BELIEVE