

# F O C U S

VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE, LLC

## Blue in the Face: The Effects of Blue Light on Sleep

Aside from temperature, light is the single most important trigger our body uses to regulate sleep and waking. When light is low, our bodies release a hormone called melatonin. This hormone tells the body that it's time for sleep. While the sun is the major source of bright light in our lives, it's not the only source.

Electronic screens, which emit blue light, are another constant source. Exposure to blue light at bedtime can trick our bodies into slowing the release of melatonin. This light source is also paired with stimulating on-screen activities. Scrolling through social media, finishing up work tasks, and watching gripping TV shows are all too entertaining for our brains to put down. Blue light and internet browsing before bed can negatively affect sleep. It can disturb the body's normal rhythms, hinder sleep, and impact overall health. **How using screens before bed affects sleep.** Exposure to blue light at night can disrupt your circadian rhythm. The circadian rhythm is a natural process that is part of the body's internal clock. It is the cycle of physical, mental, and behavior changes that the body goes through every 24 hours. This process repeats each day, creating a healthy loop when it isn't disturbed. Excessive exposure to blue light before bedtime can stop smooth transitions from one point in the cycle to the next. You may find yourself feeling unrested after a night's sleep or waking frequently

## 9 Tips for Parenting Peacefully—Even When Mom and Dad Disagree

*What I wish I'd known about how parents can work together to raise emotionally healthy children.*

Nothing can prepare you for being a parent, and one “expert” opinion sometimes conflicts with another. We all want to do the right thing — raise the best kids we can — but it's not a straightforward process, especially when Mom and Dad don't agree over hot button topics, methods, and even the basic purpose of parenting. But all the anguish, sleepless nights, second-guessing and, even the actual decisions, won't affect our kids as much as how we work with our partner in handling the situations. Having been in the trenches and learned the hard way, here are a few tips I wish I'd known when my children were growing up. All that therapy money could've easily funded a family trip to Hawaii!

1. Keep your mind set on the big picture — and keep resetting it! The more you and your partner can stay focused on big, mutual objectives for your children (such as being ethical, independent adults), the more you can prioritize what's worth arguing about. If it doesn't compromise established long-term goals, why is it even an issue? Yes, your kid may be wearing two different sneakers to school, but is it really worth arguing about? Keep discussing what you want for your children when you have time, and it will allow you to focus when things are spiraling out of control.
2. Accept what you've been given. Don't take out your frustration with a spouse's personality quirk on the child who carries that same trait. Accepting family members as they are may be a challenge, but when you embrace that mind shift, many daily tensions are eased. And children who are loved for who they are grow up to be confident with their own strengths.
3. Don't underestimate the power of low blood sugar levels. Brains operate on glucose. Low glucose decreases cognitive functions and increases emotional outbursts. While Madison Avenue may have us believe a candy bar will bring us back to our former selves, try fruits, nuts, and veggies instead, and keep them readily available. Offer them to your spouse, children, and yourself before things heat up.
4. Take lessons from covert operators to discuss things privately. There's no such thing as “out of earshot” when kids are around. That same child who, sitting in the next room, can't hear you calling him to dinner 43 times will decipher the smallest whisper uttered miles away if it involves something you don't want him to hear. Those parents driving around the block with the windows rolled up? They're trying to have a private conversation. Whatever you can do to get truly private moment to discuss things, it's worth the effort.
5. We all have meltdowns. Whether we're 2, 32, or 72, some days life's just too much. Parents often instinctively love the child who is unhappiest. We have to extend that grace to others. Accept that some days your spouse is just going to be difficult. Be extra nice on that day — and maybe it will be reciprocated when you're having a bad day.

throughout the night. When melatonin production decreases, the body may think that it's still daytime while you're trying to sleep. This can cause you to feel more awake. You may find yourself wanting to look at something on your phone screen until you feel tired. This has the opposite effect and only disrupts sleep further. Preventing the negative effects of blue light on sleep:

**Lights down at sundown.** Turn off all bright lights at least an hour before bed. Dim light doesn't impede the production of melatonin. **Stop scrolling.** If possible, avoid using 30 minutes screens before bed. Even phone screens emit enough blue light to affect melatonin production. Try turning down your screen brightness or use a dim light to read a book or a printout instead of scrolling on your phone. **Wind down.** Create a 30–60-minute wind down routine before bed, if possible. During your wind down, it's best to perform relaxing activities such as nighttime hygiene, reading, or stretching. Try to do these outside the bedroom so your brain associates your bed with sleep only. **Block out distractions.** Keep your sleep area clear of excess noise and light. Blackout curtains, sleep masks, or white noise generators can be effective tools.

**Waketime.** Choose a consistent wake time and stick to it. Wake with enough time to have a full day and be ready for bedtime. This helps solidify your circadian rhythm and creates other sleep triggers for your body. **Nightlights.** Sleeping with bright lights on can also disrupt natural sleep cycles. Instead, try using a dim nightlight or red light. These can help keep you drowsy and ready for sleep.

**Get bright light during the day.** Expose yourself to bright lights early and often during the day. Spend time outdoors whenever possible. This promotes wakefulness during the day and drowsiness at night. Blue light exposure near bedtime can have a disruptive effect on sleep. This can lead to poor sleep and drowsiness during the day. Following these steps and avoiding screens before bed can help you create better sleep habits.

Improving sleep can help your mood, your health, and your ability to think clearly. **Source: Matt Gratton, University of Kansas/Children's Mercy Hospital. Society of Behavioral Medicine, 2024.**

#### (Tips for Parenting continued)

6. Walk away. Get rid of the “bang head here” poster in your kitchen and recognize that sometimes it's easiest to just walk away in the heat of the moment. It's family; they aren't going far. And the issue doesn't disappear just because you avoid it at the moment. Plan to work things out later, but not every flame needs to be stoked to eruption. And a little perspective is always healthy.
7. You may not be right. Believe it or not, sometimes the other adult does have good thoughts about raising the children. Be open and listen to his or her ideas.
8. Let some things go. Alternatively, you may be right... but it might not be a big enough issue to fight over or to let gather emotional steam. Elsa is right: learn to let it go.
9. Learn to laugh. More than anything, seeing the humor in situations deflects anger, tension, embarrassment, and more. Family life is often absurd. It may be a tough choice between laughing or screaming, but the outcomes are drastically different. Plus, when you choose laughter, you're teaching your child to see the silver lining in daily troubles.

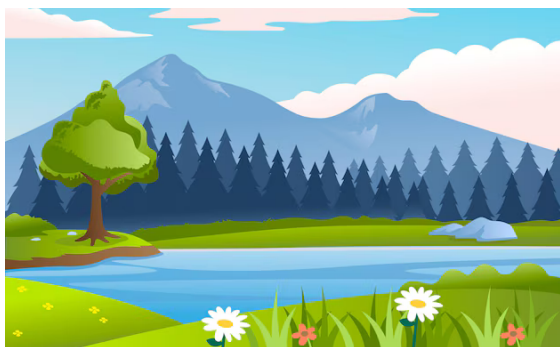
**Source: Theresa Keegan is a freelance writer based in northern California. She has received numerous regional and national awards for her writing, including the Cissy Patterson Fellowship from the American Press Institute. Her work has appeared in Newsday, USA Today, Miami Herald, Living & Being magazine and on National Public Radio. Her writing specialties include education, family, and politics. Keegan credits her observational writing style on the survival skills she learned growing up in New York as the youngest of six siblings. Keegan is married to her husband Kevin, and they have two (thankfully!) grown daughters and a quirky rescue dog. When not writing she can be found biking, swimming and attempting to take a selfie that her daughters won't ridicule. [GreatSchools.org](https://www.greatschools.org) December 5, 2019**

## Why Is Nature So Good For Your Mental Health?

*A new study suggests that nature may make us happier and healthier because it inspires awe.*

In recent years, a number of wilderness therapy programs have cropped up to help people who suffer from mental health challenges. These trips often involve physically and emotionally engaging experiences—like backpacking or rock-climbing in remote areas—combined with therapeutic work from caring professionals. Something about being engaged in nature seems to help hard-to-treat patients open up, find new confidence, and focus their lives in more positive directions. Psychologists who conduct these programs believe there is healing power in nature, bolstered by research that suggests green spaces are good for our health, our well-being, and even our relationships. But what is the secret ingredient in nature that brings about these benefits? A recent study, led by researcher Craig Anderson and his colleagues (including the Greater Good Science Center's faculty director, Dacher Keltner), suggests it could be awe—that sense of being in the presence of something greater than ourselves that fills us with wonder. Participants in the first phase of the study were military veterans and underserved youth who went on either a one-day or four-day river rafting trip. Rafters traveled through the forested canyons of the American River in California or the dramatic rock formations of Dinosaur National Monument in Utah, encountering up to intermediate-level rapids. While participants sometimes paddled through the rapids themselves, other times they rode while guides paddled. On the longer trips, they camped out in remote, unpopulated areas. Before and after the trip, the participants reported on

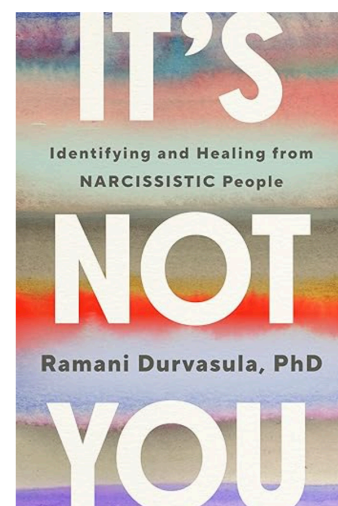
**(Nature continued)** their well-being, including their stress levels, mood, and satisfaction with life. During the trip, they kept diaries at the end of each day about their feelings, including whether they'd felt awe, amusement, peace, gratitude, joy, or pride that day. At the end of the trip, participants' well-being had increased dramatically, with youth particularly helped by the experience. Analyzing the diary entries, the researchers discovered that awe—above and beyond any of the other positive emotions—seemed to explain these improvements. “Experiencing awe in nature is a powerful way to impact people’s psychology, even as they’re doing something they really like to do,” says Anderson. Next, Anderson and his colleagues decided to study whether awe played a role in more ordinary, everyday nature experiences. After all, rafting experiences have many components that could be beneficial, and the participants had not been randomly assigned to go on the trip; they had volunteered. In this second study phase, undergraduate students kept daily diaries for two weeks, recounting positive experiences they’d had during the day (which might or might not include awe or nature), as well as their feelings and overall satisfaction with life. They also filled out well-being surveys before and after the two weeks. Analyses of the diaries showed that students who spent time in nature on a given day felt more satisfied with life that evening than those who didn’t, and that experiences of awe predicted that boost more than any other positive emotion. Thanks to this pattern, students who spent more days in nature over the two weeks saw greater improvements in well-being during that time. This is good news, says Anderson, because sometimes it’s not that easy for people to invest in long, expensive wilderness trips in order to heal. “Our findings suggest that you don’t have to do extravagant, extraordinary experiences in nature to feel awe or to get benefits,” says Anderson. “By taking a few minutes to enjoy flowers that are blooming or a sunset in your day-to-day life, you also improve your well-being.” Why would experiencing awe have these effects? Anderson doesn’t know for sure, but he speculates that awe may benefit well-being by inducing a “small self”—the sense that you are in the presence of something bigger than yourself—which may make past worries or present cares feel less significant by comparison. But he also concedes that there could be other ways that nature experiences improve our well-being, besides inducing awe. In the river rafting trip, for example, the physical exercise or camaraderie could have made a difference to participants, since both are tied to well-being. And some students also experienced gratitude on days they were in nature—and this, too, led them to be more satisfied with life. More research needs to be done to tease out awe’s specific role in nature’s healing power, Anderson says. But, whatever the case, he believes there’s enough evidence to encourage us to add more nature to our daily life and to protect our national parks—which, he says, are an important part of our public health system. “Our study illustrates the importance of trying to find moments to enjoy nature and feel in awe of it,” Anderson says. “People need to learn to slow down and make space for that in their lives.” **Source: Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is Greater Good’s former book review editor and now serves as a staff writer and contributing editor for the magazine. She received her doctorate of psychology from the University of San Francisco in 1998 and was a psychologist in private practice before coming to Greater Good. [greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu) April, 19, 2019.**



## INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

From clinical psychologist and expert in narcissistic relationships. Dr. Ramani Durvasula, a guide to protecting and healing yourself from the daily harms of narcissism

**AN OPEN FIELD  
PUBLICATION FROM  
MARIA SHRIVER**



It's not always easy to tell when you're dealing with a narcissist. One day they draw you in with their confidence and charisma, the next they gaslight you, wreck your self-confidence, and leave you wondering, What could I have done differently?

As Dr. Ramani Durvasula reveals in *It's Not You*, the answer is: absolutely nothing. Just as a tiger can't change its stripes, a narcissist won't stop manipulating and invalidating you. To heal in the aftermath of their abuse and protect yourself from future harm, you first have to accept that you are not to blame.

Deeply compassionate and revelatory, *It's Not You* examines how narcissists hijack our wellbeing and offers a healing path forward. Drawing on more than 20 years of studying, teaching, and helping clients navigate the landscape of narcissism, Dr. Durvasula unpacks the oft-misunderstood personality, showing how to identify the telltale signs that you may be dealing with a narcissist and protect yourself from their toxic influence. Along the way, you'll learn how to become gaslight resistant, chip away at the trauma bonds that keep us stuck in these cycles, grieve the losses, create realistic boundaries, learn the fine art of discernment, and recover your sense of self after years of invalidation.

Healing and thriving after or even during a narcissistic relationship can be challenging, but it is possible. *It's Not You* shows that the first step is to stop trying to change the narcissistic person, stop blaming yourself, and start giving yourself permission to foster your autonomy and sense of self outside of this relationship.

**Source: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)**



## Do Women's Tears Turn Men into Softies?

*Inside a secret language our bodies use to communicate with each other.*

Our bodies and minds are more connected than we thought. The psychological is the physiological, research continues to show. The powerful effect of women's tears is proof of that.

In research published in PLOS Biology, Shari Aaron, Claire de March, and colleagues found across three studies that exposure to chemo signals, or chemical signals, in women's tears made men feel less aggressive. The study participants were exposed to either emotional tears from women, that is, tears produced from real feelings, or a saline solution. The male participants played a rigged game intended to provoke anger and aggression. When exposed to the real tears, the level of aggression among the subjects was rate as 43.7 percent lower than that of men exposed to the saline solution.

The team's second study identified four olfactory receptors that were activated, demonstrating that despite being perceptually odorless, human emotional tears send a signal that generates a brain response through the main olfactory system. The third study aimed to understand the brain's response to sniffing tears in the context of aggression. While participants were exposed to treats or saline while playing the aggression game. The researchers used fMRI to find that two regions previously implicated on aggression saw significant decreases in activity while sniffing real tears. The researchers then observed strong connections between the brain networks associated with aggression and olfaction, concluding that tears decrease activity in the brain regions responsible for aggression.

The study's authors speculated that these chemosignals, and the results they produce, may serve as a subconscious protection mechanism for women.

The study was limited because it had a small sample size of 25 men, but its findings are likely to drive more research, given the implications. The tears of a baby also contain chemo signals. It's possible that they could have a similar purpose. Perhaps such chemo signals can even be synthesized for use in conflict-resolution settings.

The barrier between mind and body seems to be porous. We know that physical activities like exercise and sleep can affect our mood and fight anxiety and depression, for instance. In light of this research, we may ask how else the brain's cognitive and physical function are intertwined.

**Source: William Haseltine, Ph.D. May/June 2024, Psychology Today.**

## How to Make a Home Safer for a Person with Alzheimer's

*People in the early stages of Alzheimer's are often capable of living on their own with provided they make certain alterations to their home.*

### Quick adjustments to home

1. Pick a few, key places to post lists of emergency phone numbers (on the fridge, next to the person's bed).
2. Make sure the senior has smoke detectors and alarms that are fully functional. As an added precaution against fire, purchase appliances with automatic shut-offs as people with Alzheimer's sometimes forget that they are cooking something.
3. Install night lights in hallways and rooms for better visibility. Use colored tape or paint to make stairs more conspicuous to the elderly.
4. Store a person's valuable or important belongings in the same places in their home so that they don't have to work hard to remember where they put things. Use labels to mark drawers and cupboards. As Alzheimer's progresses, it will likely become necessary for a person to either enter an assisted care facility or move in with family members.

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### Tips to ensure your home is safe

1. Keep medications out of sight and in a secure, preferably locked, cabinet or drawer that a person with Alzheimer's can't access.
2. Arrange furniture in a simple manner and don't move things around too much. Alzheimer's often impairs people's ability to accurately place themselves in time and space, so switching up room layouts too often may confuse and distress them.
3. Make sure to remove potential tripping hazards like rugs, clutter, and furniture that is low to the ground.
4. Install grab bars and railings in places that could be slippery or difficult for a person to maneuver in, such as bathrooms and closets.
5. Consider installing a removable hand-held shower head. People with Alzheimer's can become disoriented and anxious because of the loud splashing and hard spray of a conventional shower.
6. Take the dials off of stoves and other potentially dangerous appliances so that a person with dementia doesn't injure themselves or start a fire. **Source: Anne-Marie Botek, Aging Care: <https://www.agingcare.com/articles/home-safety-tips-alzheimers-disease-148700.htm>**

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