



Up, Up AND OUT

It all began with the guest who ran away. Our family was very excited when Uncle Mendy* came to visit. Two *bachurim* moved out of their room, happy to sleep on mattresses on the floor so Uncle Mendy would have the “guest room.” They kept the grumbling to a minimum when faced with the task of sorting their gazillion stacks of papers, each neatly folded in eight, so that Uncle Mendy would have a surface or two for his own stuff. They transferred their clothes to temporary quarters in other rooms, so as not to disturb Uncle Mendy in the mornings.

They needn't have bothered.

By morning, Uncle Mendy was gone.

We were close to calling 911 when he turned up, poking his head out of the neighbor's basement, still somewhat bleary-eyed.

What happened?

Alarm clocks.

Uncle Mendy's sleep was blissful until about 4:30 a.m., when he was awakened by the high-pitched chirping of a flock of birds. He wondered where all those birds had come from, and why they were so *close* and so *loud*, but what can be done about birds? So he pulled the blanket over his head and tried to sleep. After 20 minutes, when the birds finally tapered off, and Uncle Mendy had just dozed off again the

beeping started. Followed by the ringing. And then his pillow began to vibrate violently, and a strident buzz dug a tunnel directly into his brain. Across the room, the other bed was having convulsions, as a thumping, bumping Something pounded it mercilessly.

Uncle Mendy wasn't taking any chances. He ran for his life, taking refuge in the neighbor's basement, where he slept for the remainder of his stay.

Since then, every time we have guests for Shabbos, we do this thing where we look around the table in horror on Friday night, everyone eyeing everyone else and whispering, “Did someone shut off all the alarm clocks?”

We did not get rid of them. In fact, they still hold pride of place in our home, from the modest beep-beep model to the three-alarm contraption one *bachur* installed in a shoebox on his wall, to the sophisticated Sonic Boom of Uncle Mendy's nightmares. Because alarm clocks are a *cheftzah shel mitzvah*; they wake *bachurim* in the morning for *Shacharis*.

Except when they don't.

Because some boys have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning.

So... then what?

Most educators agree on what doesn't work: endless rounds of waking and shaking or fighting about getting out of bed.

Let's talk about what does work, instead!

Going to sleep on time! (That's brilliant... right?) For many teens, going to bed even a half-hour earlier makes the difference. One mother's secret weapon for her hard-to-wake *bachur*: melatonin. Also noteworthy is that when teens experience a noticeable growth spurt, they may struggle with mornings for a while, as they truly do need more sleep then.

Know your alarm clocks. Choose an alarm that has flexible options, so your son can set them in a way that works for him. Our Sonic Alert alarm clock has settings for volume, length of time to ring, how many minutes of snooze, and an option for a second alarm. And, of course, it vibrates the pillow. (One boy we know threads the vibrator down his sleeve — try it to find out why that's more effective.)

There are also singing alarms, alarms that emit random alternating sounds, flying alarms, and alarms that won't stop until you perform a specific sequence of tasks, proving that you are *awake*. Put the alarm clock at a distance from the bed, so that your son has to get out of bed to shut it off.

Mrs. Perl Abramowitz, parenting coach, advises parents that difficulty waking in the morning is absolutely normal for an adolescent or teen. It's age-appropriate behavior and, on its own, is not reason for concern. "It's individuation; they're finding their own voices." When they were younger, Mommy woke them; now they will wake up when they feel ready.

So what can a parent do?

Connect to your teen where he's at. Validate and say, "I know! You're a teenager, it's so hard to get up!" Once you've connected, you can continue with various techniques.

Encourage: "You can do it. I know you can!"

Bribe: "If you're out on time, we'll have a sushi night out."

Give him a life lesson: "You'll feel so good once you're out that you woke up on time; it will be worth it."

Be joyful: "This is my *zechus*, to wake you up to go learn."

Use humor: "Last one up has to find Yanky's shoes!"

Or you can let it go. He knows there will be consequences in *yeshivah*; you don't need to add more stress.

"Do any of the above," says Mrs. Abramowitz. "What should *not* come across to your child is any stress, anger, shame or worry over his future."

What about chronic oversleepers? The kind who *really* can't get out of bed morning after morning?

Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua Abowitz, who trained in CBT with Kiviti USA and in DBT under Rabbi Shmelka Klein, is co-founder of Hadrachah, a coaching institute that provides services for *bachurim*. He outlines three approaches to

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helping *bachurim* wake up on time.

The first assumes that it must be that it's easier for him not to wake up than to wake up. Maybe his days are empty, or his day is very challenging, and he simply doesn't want to face it. In that case, he has to first figure out what is going wrong during his waking hours. Once he feels satisfied with his day, waking up will come naturally.

The second approach targets the dialogue in the brain.

When a boy hears his alarm clock, there's an argument in his mind. One voice says "wake up," and the other says "I can't." He has to learn to change the conversation, so he replaces "I can't" with "It's hard." Then he has to learn to say, "It's hard, but I can do it." This works well for boys who seem to have resigned themselves to lateness for life.

The third approach is for the ADHD child. He lives in the moment; there's almost zero connection to the past or future. When he goes to sleep, he's convinced that he's going to wake up. But in the morning, he's in sleep mode and he can't get out of it. The goal is to help him transition from sleep to the next part of the day. He can set two alarms, and write a message on each one: "I wanted to wake up on time." This reminds him that he has a goal and helps him connect to it, while giving him that bit of space between the two alarms to switch modes. Other ideas would be to leave his *gemara* or a paper listing his goals for the day right near his bed.

No matter which approach you use, it should always be clear that waking up is your son's responsibility. You're there to help, to facilitate, to encourage, but it's not about you. ■

Mrs. Paluch is the author of "Boy Oh Boy!" — the engaging guide for mothers of one boy or a dozen. Comments and topic suggestions related to this column can be directed to magazine@hamodia.com.