

High School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Develop family habits that support your teen's learning

The idea of “reinforcing learning” can be tricky when you are the parent of a high school student. You may not feel that you remember or know enough about what your teen is learning to reinforce it.

That's OK. Families can support learning by creating everyday opportunities that make it possible. Here's how:

- **Talk about the jobs** people hold whenever you visit a business with your teen. Discuss the education needed for such a job, but keep the conversation casual. Do not turn the occasion into a lecture.
- **Plan some family projects** that involve math skills, such as painting a room or cooking a meal. Get your teen involved.

- **Encourage your teen** to research and explore. Ask for help finding the best buy for something your family needs or getting information about a new place for your family to visit.
- **Show your interest** in anything new your teen learns at school. Ask your student to explain those concepts to you.
- **Encourage your teen's talents**, even if they are not in the areas you would have wished for. These talents may become the foundation of a future career.
- **Ask for your teen's opinions.** Teens are usually aware of major current events and have given them some thought. Listen carefully and thank your teen for sharing—whether you agree with the viewpoint or not.

This four-step process can end procrastination



At one time or another, most students put off completing their schoolwork. But

when procrastination becomes a habit, it can negatively affect school performance.

To break the procrastination habit, have your teen:

1. **Select just one thing to do.**
Sometimes kids put things off when they feel overwhelmed. Tell your teen to focus on one assignment at a time.
2. **Set a timer for 30 minutes** and begin working on the assignment. While the timer is ticking, your teen should focus only on that assignment.
3. **Avoid breaks.** Your teen should get water or a snack *before* starting the timer to avoid interrupting work flow.
4. **Celebrate.** Once the timer goes off, encourage your teen to do something fun for a few minutes, such as kicking a ball around outside.

Your teen can repeat this process until schoolwork is complete!

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

Ask yourself these questions when setting rules for your teen



As teens grow older, they outgrow certain rules. But they aren't adults yet, and some limits still apply. The key to setting effective rules for teens is balance. They need independence but adults still need to keep some control.

Rules will be different for each family, but considering some general questions will help you set them effectively:

- **Has my teen had** a chance to talk about this rule with me? Teens should have input about rules, although parents should always make the final decision.
- **Will this rule help** my teen develop independence? Teens need to learn how to think for themselves. They need a chance to make choices and live with them. But they can't handle every choice. For example, by high school, teens can decide *when* and

where to study, but not *whether* to study.

- **Am I setting an example** by following this rule? For example, if you don't wear your seat belt when driving in a car, you shouldn't be surprised to discover your teen isn't wearing one when driving with friends.
- **Does my teen know** what will happen as a result of breaking a rule? It's important to discuss and establish consequences for misbehavior *before* the rule is broken.

“You can learn many things from children. How much patience you have, for instance.”

—Franklin P. Jones

Family expectations set the stage for academic success



Research shows that family expectations have a significant impact on high school students' achievement.

One study found that:

- **Teens strive to reach** parents' expectations of them. If you make it clear you believe in your teen and expect success in school, your student is likely to achieve more academically than if you don't.
- **Teens' expectations** for themselves begin to match the expectations their families have for them. If you say things like “I want you to give schoolwork your best effort and do well,” your high schooler

will begin to have those same expectations.

To offer inspiration:

- **Talk about** what you want your teen to achieve in high school and beyond. Ask what your teen expects.
- **Help your teen** set attainable goals—such as improving a grade in a certain class.
- **Discuss the future.** Compare your dreams for your teen with your teen's own. Talk about potential careers or college plans. Say that you have confidence in your teen and you will always be there for support.

Source: J.M. Froiland and M.L. Davison, “Parental expectations and school relationships as contributors to adolescents' positive outcomes,” *Social Psychology of Education*, Springer.

Are you helping your teen handle peer pressure?



Peer pressure is a fact of life for teens. It can be positive: Your teen decides to volunteer because friends do. And it can also be negative: Your teen skips a class because a friend does.

Are you helping your teen push back against negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you help your teen** take pride in accomplishments by saying things like, “You can be proud of yourself for ...”?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** signing up for classes and activities that match your teen's interests?
- ___ **3. Do you remind** your teen about the importance of having self-respect and avoiding activities that may lessen it?
- ___ **4. Do you reinforce** the idea that your teen is a strong individual?
- ___ **5. Do you help your teen** practice different ways to say *no*?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're giving your teen the power to resist negative peer pressure. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Be alert for patterns when investigating substance abuse



When a teen is abusing alcohol and/or drugs, a pattern of signs typically occurs. Unfortunately, families don't always see

the signs for what they are—until there is a serious problem.

Substance abuse can be a life-or-death issue. You should suspect substance abuse, or the risk of it, if you see the following signs:

- **Trouble with peers.** When teens say they have no friends, are very down on themselves or start hanging around peers who have bad reputations, they could be at risk.
- **Sudden academic problems.** There are many reasons for a big drop in grades. But if it happens along with other signs of substance

abuse, it could be part of a dangerous pattern.

- **Leaving evidence.** Things like empty beer cans and rolling papers don't just appear. If you find them, it is likely your teen knows exactly how they got there—and probably used them.
- **Not caring.** Teens involved in drugs or alcohol eventually start ignoring what was once important: concern for what parents think, for what non-using peers do, and for their own appearance.
- **Unusual events** related to money. Drugs and alcohol cost money. Teens sometimes take money from their homes to support their behavior. On the other hand, a teen who suddenly has more money than usual may be selling drugs.

Encourage your teen to take science and math classes



Research points to one effective way to make a difference for your high schooler's future: Talk about the importance

of science and math.

There are plenty of great jobs in science, technology, engineering and math. (Together, these fields are often called STEM.)

STEM-related jobs are increasing every year. Some require only a two-year associate's degree after high school. Often, STEM jobs have starting salaries of \$50,000 or higher for new college graduates.

Yet teens often avoid the math and science classes they need in high school to prepare for these jobs. That's where families can help. Explain that choosing STEM

classes now can increase future options. Then:

- **Show how current interests** can lead to STEM careers. If your high schooler is always using a certain app, suggest taking a computer science and developing a new app. If your teen is interested in how things work, a career as an engineer could be a great fit.
- **Encourage your teen** to take at least one math class and one science class every year. Students aiming for STEM careers should take a total of four years of math and four years of science while in high school.

Source: C.S. Rozek and others, "Utility-value intervention with parents increases students' STEM preparation and career pursuit," *PNAS*, National Academy of Sciences.

Q: There's clearly something bothering my high schooler. When I ask what's going on, my teen has nothing to say. I'm not sure what's behind this refusal to open up to me. How can I get my teen to tell me what's going on without being pushy?

Questions & Answers

A: Teenagers are notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to sharing problems with their parents. But you *must* keep trying to find out what is bothering your teen.

Although it's very likely that the issue is relatively minor, it's important to address it. This is especially true if it drags on for days or weeks.

To encourage your teen to share what's happening:

- **Say you are concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about absolutely anything. Part of my job as a parent is to help you figure things out."
- **Be clear** about your expectations. "I respect your privacy and the fact that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to think it over by yourself, then let's figure this out together after dinner tomorrow night."
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your teen still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, doctor, school counselor, coach or other trusted adult. By working together, you should be able to uncover what's going on with your teen.

It Matters: Schoolwork

Four common schoolwork issues have solutions



Removing schoolwork hurdles does not mean letting your teen skip assignments—that should never happen.

Instead, help your student overcome common schoolwork problems.

If your teen:

1. **Doesn't do the work**, or turn it in, say that completing assignments is a top priority. Then share organization strategies. For example, encourage your teen to make a to-do list each day. Learn about the benefits of writing down tasks in the article on this page.
2. **Doesn't care about schoolwork**, provide motivation by showing connections between what your teen is learning and the real world. Offer praise as your teen makes progress toward goals. Also, make it clear that other activities will have to wait until assignments are completed.
3. **Doesn't understand assignments**, or directions, suggest checking in with the teacher. Encourage your teen to review all assignments *before* leaving class and get any needed clarification.
4. **Has too much work**—or not enough, assess how your student is doing in the class. If your teen is doing fine, then the workload is probably the right amount to reinforce the concepts that are being taught. However, if schoolwork typically takes your student all night—or if there is only a small amount each day and your teen is struggling in the class—your teen should ask the teacher for help.

Help your teen get a jump start on schoolwork in 10 minutes

When high schoolers do a little work in advance, schoolwork seems like less of a chore. In just 10 minutes of spare time, students can get a head start on assignments.

Encourage your teen to take advantage of small amounts of time and:

- **Learn** three new vocabulary words for English or a foreign language.
- **Skim** the next chapter in assigned reading.
- **Complete** one or two math or science problems.
- **Review** a few of the new terms that will be introduced in the next math or science lesson.
- **Find** one or two sources for an upcoming paper or project.



- **Review notes** from each of that day's classes.

Source: R. Dellabough, *101 Ways to Get Straight A's*, Troll Communication.

Writing down tasks keeps high school students focused



Teens can be easily distracted—and that's very obvious when they sit down to study. But writing tasks down can

motivate your teen to get to work faster and stay focused longer.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Make daily to-do lists.** Your teen should write down everything that needs to be completed that day. Then, it's time to create a schedule. Remind your teen to include one five- to 10-minute break after each hour of studying.
- **Use a weekly planner** to schedule activities for the upcoming week—classes, appointments, practices,

family dinners, etc. Then your teen should fill in study time. Seeing what needs to be finished before your teen can go out with friends on Friday night provides motivation to stick to the schedule and follow through.

- **Use a monthly calendar** to plan for long-term projects. Your teen can break down larger assignments into shorter steps and give each step a due date. Big projects don't seem as intimidating when there's a clear plan of smaller, more manageable tasks to complete. A written plan will help your student stay on track and complete the whole project on time.