

High School Parents[®]

still make the difference!

October 2024
Vol. 32, No. 2



Reinforce study skills to help your teen's developing brain

Teens' brains are still developing—and they continue to develop until they reach adulthood. During adolescence, high school students are learning how to think analytically, plan ahead, solve problems and control impulses.

While teens may be able to process more complicated and abstract information, they need practice putting these new skills to work. Teens also need to develop processes that help them learn new information.

To support this developmental stage, encourage your teen to:

- **Color-code materials** to stay organized. For example, your teen might write down assignments in blue ink, new information in red ink and long-term project details

in green ink. Your teen's brain will categorize the information it sees in different colors as it processes what steps to take next.

- **Use charts and diagrams** to visualize new information. Seeing facts in graphic form may make it easier for your teen to comprehend the material and recall it later.
- **Outline the steps** of long-term projects. This will help your teen keep track of progress, what remains to be done and due dates.
- **Rely on routines.** Consistent expectations from you will help your teen stay up-to-date with school assignments, manage time when studying for tests and more.

Source: P. Lorain, "Brain Development in Young Adolescents," National Education Association.

Try these five family-tested discipline tips



Student behavior affects a teacher's ability to teach, as well as your teen's ability to learn.

To support better school discipline, try these tips at home:

1. **Stay actively involved** in your teen's life. Ask about classes. Go to school events when possible. Meet your teen's friends.
2. **Discuss the dangers** of drugs and alcohol. They are a part of many teen's social activities. And they can take a serious toll on your teen's health and school performance.
3. **Involve your teen** in setting rules. Teens are more likely to follow rules they helped create.
4. **Set consequences** and enforce them consistently. A consequence may not have to be severe if your teen knows that you will always impose it.
5. **Work with the school.** If a teacher contacts you with a concern, keep an open mind. Listen to all sides before making a decision or taking action.

Source: D.W. Haffner, *What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today's Challenges With Wisdom and Heart*, HarperCollins.

Motivate your teen to read by recommending specific books



According to the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, only 14 percent of students say they read for fun every day. In addition, 31 percent of students say they never or hardly ever read for fun. How can families get their teens to read more?

Experts have found that teens are much more likely to do things when they are given specific instructions rather than general suggestions. Suggesting a specific book for your teen to read may be more effective than saying, “You should read more.” But with all the books out there, how do you know which one to recommend?

1. Ask about the types of books your teen enjoys—fantasy, romance, science fiction, mystery, etc.

2. Visit book recommendation websites. Sites like Goodreads, offer lists and reviews tailored to specific genres and age groups.

3. Select a few titles you think your teen might like and make a list.

The next time your teen is heading to the library, take a look at your list and suggest a title to check out.

Source: T. Cremin and L. Scholes, “Reading for pleasure: scrutinising the evidence base—benefits, tensions and recommendations,” *Language and Education*, Taylor & Francis.

**“Reading gives us
someplace to go when
we have to stay where
we are.”**

—Mason Cooley

Show your high schooler how to establish healthy phone habits



The use of digital devices can have a significant impact on students’ academic performance, mental health and overall well-being.

To instill healthy digital habits, encourage your teen to:

- **Have face-to-face conversations.** Does your teen text you or other family members from another room in your home? If so, suggest your teen stop texting and start talking.
- **Try to find answers independently.** Asking “Siri” for answers won’t teach your teen how to solve problems or conduct research.
- **Turn off devices during lunch.** Teens benefit from having social interactions with their peers. So, recommend your teen make a

pact with friends: “The first person to pick up their phone has to throw everyone’s lunch trash away.”

- **Face awkward or boring situations** without turning to the phone. Challenge your teen to find other ways to pass the time.
- **Be aware of mood.** Too much screen time can leave teens feeling lonely, anxious or depressed. When that happens, encourage your teen to get off social media and turn to a friend or trusted adult.
- **Establish a cooling-off period.** Say, “If you see a text or post that makes you mad, wait 24 hours before sending a response.” That will give your teen time to think about how to address the situation.

Source: L. Kolb, “6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones,” *International Society for Technology in Education*.

Are you helping your teen handle academic issues?



For many teens, there is one class that is a real challenge. Perhaps the teacher isn’t their favorite. Perhaps the subject is more complex. Whatever the issue, their grades begin to suffer.

If your teen is struggling in a class, do you know how to help? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you talk** with your teen about the class? Ask, “Why do you think you are struggling?”

___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to spend time studying for the class every day? Minds are like muscles that get stronger with practice.

___ **3. Do you suggest** your teen talk with the teacher to develop a plan for improvement?

___ **4. Do you help** your teen explore resources, such as tutoring?

___ **5. Do you celebrate** every sign of your teen’s progress?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are ready to take positive steps to help your student cope with struggles. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

**High School
Parents**
still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Digital literacy helps high school students evaluate online material



The internet brings a world of information right to your teen's fingertips. However, information available online is not regulated for quality or accuracy. That means some of it is just junk.

Whether it's for a school assignment or for personal information, it's vital that your teen develop digital literacy—the ability to assess the level of accuracy, reliability and bias of online sources.

Teach your teen to:

- **Use a variety of search engines.** When checking out different sites, your teen should remember that many search engines are “pay for play.” In other words, people pay to have their site pop up first.

- **Ask questions.** When reading *anything* online, your teen should ask: *Is the purpose of the site to sell a product or agenda? Where do the “facts” come from?*
- **Check out other sites.** Your teen should use a search engine to find other sites on the same subject. Comparing two or three sites side by side can help your teen see the limits and merits of each.
- **Be wary of health information.** Many sites are in business to sell products. Your teen should talk to a doctor about medical information found online.
- **Remember** that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Source: J. Breakstone and others, *Students' Civic Online Reasoning: A National Portrait*, The Stanford History Education Group, Stanford University.

School counselors provide academic and social support



Your teenager's high school counselor is a valuable resource for both of you. School counselors are highly-trained professionals who are equipped to support students' academic and social development—from choosing classes to dealing with social or behavioral challenges.

Counselors can assist families with a variety of issues. Contact the counselor if:

- **You have questions** about your teen's classes. These can include scheduling questions for next year or issues with current classes.
 - **You are concerned** about your teen's behavior. School counselors are trained to help students identify and work through difficult issues.
- Remind your teen that the counselor is a trusted adult to go to for guidance.
- **Your teen's grades are suffering.** School counselors can help families and students figure out the source of academic problems and develop solutions to get grades back on track.
 - **You are facing a crisis.** Counselors can provide support and assistance to students and families as they navigate crisis situations or emergencies.
 - **You have questions** about your teen's future. School counselors can help students decide what they want to do after high school. They can offer advice on potential careers and training, as well as tips for reaching higher education goals.

Q: I didn't do well in math when I was in school. Now my high schooler is taking a math class that I don't understand. When my teen struggles with a math assignment, I don't know how to help. How can I offer support?

Questions & Answers

A: You *can* help your teen with math assignments—even if you don't know how to do the math. Here's how:

- **Have a positive attitude.** Several studies show that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in math. So instead of saying things like, “I was never very good in math,” say, “Wow, that looks challenging. But I know you will be able to figure it out!”
- **Ask your teen to explain** the math problem to you. Say, “Tell me step by step how you think you should solve it.” This is one of the best ways for students to figure out a new math concept.
- **Suggest writing down** the steps your teen takes to solve each problem. While there may be only one right answer to a problem, there may be many ways to arrive at it. Then, the teacher can see what your teen did—and if the answer is wrong, the teacher will know where things went off track.
- **Point out times** during the day when you use math. Whether you use math on the job or to double a recipe, your teen will see that the subject is important for everyday life.
- **Encourage your teen** to persist. The feeling of finally “getting it,” will motivate your teen to persist when facing new challenges.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Empower your teen to make wise decisions



Your teen will have to make all kinds of decisions over the course of high school, from class selection to

how to face difficult peer pressure. Help your teen learn how to make responsible decisions that will foster success both academically and socially.

When your teen has a choice to make, take these steps together:

1. **Ask your teen to describe** the situation. Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with just *yes* or *no*.
2. **Discuss possible options.** Help your teen brainstorm different alternatives by evaluating the benefits and disadvantages of each option. Talk through how different consequences could affect your teen's goals.
3. **Allow your teen to make** a decision and carry it out. Later, ask, "What did you learn from making that choice? Would you make the same—or a different—decision if faced with a similar problem in the future?"

Remember: Sometimes teens will challenge family values and beliefs; however, they still need guidance to make important decisions about the future. Teenagers often rebel as a way to assert their independence. But with your support and unconditional love, your teen will develop the judgment that leads to responsible decisions.

Source: American Medical Association, "Helping Your Teen Make Responsible Choices," Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

Self-discipline & responsibility promote academic success

Discipline and responsibility are crucial ingredients for academic success. And there are many ways families can help teens become more self-disciplined and responsible.

Have your teen:

- **Schedule and keep track of** personal appointments. High schoolers are old enough to make their own haircut and medical appointments, for example.
- **Set a budget and stick to it.** Many teens have spending money from an allowance or a part-time job. A budget helps teens pay attention to their spending—and see that adding to savings can be more rewarding than making a purchase.
- **Plan a family activity.** Let your teen take charge and organize a picnic at a nearby park, a trip to a local museum or historic site, or perhaps a visit to a relative.



- **Read news articles.** Learning about the issues facing world leaders helps teens see that their responsibilities (like walking the dog and doing laundry) aren't the burdens they may have previously thought they were.

Address common attendance excuses from your high schooler



Attending school on time, every day is one of your teen's most important responsibilities. But many students come up with last-minute excuses to get out of going to school.

Here is a list of common excuses teens use—and ways to respond:

- **"I don't feel good."** Say, "OK. I'll need to take you to the doctor then."
- **"I have a project due in one of my classes that I still need to finish."** Explain that poor time management isn't a valid excuse.

- **"I need more sleep."** Offer strategies for getting more sleep, such as reducing recreational screen time and going to bed an hour earlier each night.
- **"I need to rest before the big game tonight."** School comes before all extracurricular activities, and "big" events are no exception. However, constantly trying to stay home from school may be a sign of a larger problem. Speak to teachers or the school counselor if you are worried about your teen's reluctance to attend school.