

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

HIGH SCHOOL



May 2025

Ask your teen to review this year and set goals for the next

At the end of a busy school year, your teen may be eager to move on to summer break. But it is helpful to spend some time together now reviewing how this year has gone. This review can then be a benchmark for setting academic goals for next year.

Schedule a time to discuss your teen's views on the year. To get the conversation started, ask questions like:

- **What was your favorite class?** Why?
- **What was your least favorite?** Why?
- **Has your performance** this year matched your expectations? Why or why not?
- **Do you feel that your grades** reflect what you've learned?
- **Which teachers have you had the best relationships** with this year? Why do you think that is?



Next, ask what your student would like to improve. Writing skills? Time management? Have your teen come up with a list of new learning goals. Work together to list the steps your teen will take to reach each goal. Is there is anything your teen could do before the fall to begin making progress? For example, could your teen take a community college course over the summer?

Whatever plan your teen comes up with, offer support and encouragement along the way. Your high expectations can motivate your teen to put effort into reaching goals.



Learning is what education is all about

Asking about school every day tells your teen that education matters to you. To demonstrate that you care about more than grades and test scores, focus your teen's attention on education's real purpose: learning.

Discuss academic subjects and concepts, and your student's growing understanding of the learning process. You can ask your teen about:

- **Reading material.** Can your teen give you a summary? Is a plot point similar to your teen's life?
- **Small successes.** For example, how did your teen go about solving a difficult math problem?
- **Thought-provoking** experiences. Has your student read,

heard or done something that led to reconsidering an opinion?

- **A test.** Was it an effective way to assess what students in the class knew about the material?
- **Growth.** What lessons has your teen learned from setbacks? What new skill might your teen use in the future?

Source: "Grades vs Learning: Shifting Attention to What's Important," The Graide Network, The Chicago Literacy Alliance.

Attendance still matters

By May, some students decide that the school year is already over. They skip classes. They go outside for lunch and don't come back in. Emphasize to your teen that attendance in every class is just as important now as it was in September. Teachers are still teaching new material, and class review sessions make end-of-year tests less scary.

Share a timely strategy

The time left to complete schoolwork before the end of the year is going fast. That makes a habit of putting things off a problem. To fight procrastination, have your teen:

1. **Choose one task** to start with.
2. **Set a timer** for 30 minutes. During this time, your teen should focus only on that task.
3. **Relax for a few minutes** when the timer goes off. Then, repeat the process.



Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child*, Walker Books.

Prep for summer homework

Some of next year's classes will have assignments that students must complete this summer. Before this school year ends, help your teen:

- **Review** assignments and get clarification from teachers if needed.
- **Gather** resources, such as books from the school library.
- **Divide** assignments into parts, and schedule plenty of time over the summer to complete each part.

Then, help your student get an early start. Remind your teen, "Doing your best on this assignment will help shape what next year's teacher thinks of you."



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Can I help my teen handle school frustration better?

Q: My ninth grader constantly moans that life is unfair. Every day I hear a list of complaints about classmates and teachers. None of them are serious, but my teen usually looks so frustrated. What should I do?

A: It's important for teens to feel heard. So, when your student brings you complaints, listen attentively.

Things that don't seem serious to you may seem very serious to your teen. Restate what you hear back to your student. You might say something like, "You seem upset about that." Don't try to rush in with advice or a solution. Instead, ask, "What do you think you could do about the situation?" Keep asking questions to help your teen to think through appropriate responses.

If you are worried about what you hear, or suspect that your teen is being bullied, contact the teacher or your teen's counselor and let them know what is happening. Work with them to address your student's concerns.

It may be, however, that what your teen really wants is your attention. After you listen for a few minutes, turn the conversation around to what is working in your student's life. Try to spend at least twice as long talking about positive things as negative. Paying attention in a positive way may turn things around.



Are you helping your teen address issues?

It's not too late in the year for students who are struggling in one or more classes to get help. Are you doing all you can to help identify issues and support your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Are you aware** of the signs that your teen is having difficulties (falling grades, skipped classes, etc.)?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your teen identify personal actions that may be part of the problem, such as not paying attention or neglecting to turn in work?
- ___ **3. Do you remind** your teen that asking for help when it's needed is a sign of strength?
- ___ **4. Do you urge** your teen to reach out to teachers or a counselor about resources for help through the school?

- ___ **5. Do you ask** your teen's counselor to suggest sources for help beyond the school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your student find support to make academic improvements. For each no, try that idea.

"Growth starts with deciding to no longer allow yourself to stay stuck where you are."
—Anonymous

Encourage frequent reading

In a national survey, teens who read frequently (five to seven days a week) reported less anxiety, depression and loneliness than those who read less than one day a week. Unfortunately, only 18% of the teens surveyed were frequent readers. To encourage your teen to read frequently:

- **Suggest asking friends** for book recommendations. They may tempt your teen more than ideas from adults.
- **Offer a challenge.** Can your teen read at least four books before September?
- **Visit the library** together often. Lack of access to books is a big reason teens don't read. Refresh your teen's supply regularly.

Source: "Kids & Family Reading Report," Scholastic.

Consider summer school

Summer school isn't for every student. But for many, it can be a path to academic success. Summer school can help students:

- **Stay on track** to graduate. If your teen failed a required class, summer school is an opportunity to take it again.
- **Master a challenging subject.** Taking only one class at a time lets your teen give the material full attention.



Stand up for daily exercise

Family support has a positive effect on teens' physical activity. So don't let your student miss out on the benefits of daily exercise this summer. Splitting exercise time into short bursts is more realistic for most teens than working out for hours. Your teen could walk around the block for 15 minutes in the morning, then swim or play a sport with friends for 30 minutes later in the day.

Source: J.E. Moral-Garcia and others, "Relationship of Parental Support on Healthy Habits, School Motivations and Academic Performance in Adolescents, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

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