

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



HIGH SCHOOL

February 2022

Teach your teen five ways to turn dreams into SMART goals

Your teen may be dreaming of going to medical school. Or she may be more concerned about passing her history class. Whatever she hopes to accomplish in school, knowing how to set effective goals will help her get there.

Five criteria can help students set SMART goals. The letters stand for:

- 1. Specific.** "I want to get better grades," is a wish, not a goal. "I want to raise my biology grade from a B- to an A- this quarter" is better. Your teen should also identify the specific things she will do to meet her goal.
- 2. Measureable.** How will your teen know when she's successful? She needs to set goals she can quantify. "I will turn in every assignment on time and earn at least a 92 on all my tests and quizzes."
- 3. Attainable.** Graduating first in her class may not be realistic if your teen has a B average now. But she could set a goal of making the honor roll.
- 4. Relevant.** Your teen is more likely to work hard if she has chosen a goal with results that matter to her.
- 5. Time-bound and trackable.** A target end date will keep your teen focused. Help your teen set up a system so she can see her progress.

Source: J. Traugott, "Achieving your goals: An evidence-based approach," Michigan State University Extension.



Rules and reasons help teens thrive

Teens have a strong desire for new experiences, and their brains are still developing the ability to assess risk. But while this may provide an explanation for some of your teen's behavior, it shouldn't be an excuse.

Establishing rules and limits helps your teen learn the self-discipline necessary to make wise decisions and avoid risky behavior. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- You don't need a rule** for everything. Concentrate on the most important areas—safety, schoolwork, respect for others, etc. Don't make a big deal about small, one-time issues.
- Set rules and consequences** in advance. Discuss them with your teen, and explain your reasons for them.
- Don't take misbehavior** personally. When your teen acts first and thinks later, or blurts out the wrong thing, it's not necessarily because he wants to hurt you.

Source: D. Romer and others, "Beyond stereotypes of adolescent risk taking," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*.

STEM classes open doors

Jobs in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields pay well: Salaries averaged nearly \$90,000 in 2020. Yet many teens avoid taking the classes they need in high school to prepare for these jobs.

Talk with your teen about ways STEM improves daily life (wifi is a great example). Together, learn about STEM careers that might interest her (visit www.napequity.org/stemcareers), and urge her to keep taking math and science.

Source: R. Dou and H. Cian, "Creating Pathways for Equity in STEM Through Family Engagement," NTSA.



Encourage accountability

Nagging your teen is unlikely to motivate him to work harder when he's underperforming. And jumping in to rescue him tells him you don't think he's capable.

Instead, remind your teen that *he* has control over his success or failure in school. Leave the decision of whether and how to do the work to your teen. He's more likely to step up and figure things out for himself—or learn from the consequences.

Reinforce reading recall

When your teen reads to learn, she needs to be able to recall the material. Share this four step process:

- 1. Picture.** After your teen reads the passage, have her close her eyes and try to "see" the content.
- 2. Predict.** Asking herself what she thinks will happen next helps her stay focused.
- 3. Summarize.** If she's reading about the Romans, for example, how did they conquer and hold their empire?
- 4. Connect.** New information is more likely to stick in her mind if she can relate it to things she already knows.



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Shouldn't I have a say in choosing my teen's classes?

Q: It's time to select classes for next year. I want to discuss my ninth grader's options, but he doesn't want me to be involved. He says it's "his life, his choice." Should I back off?

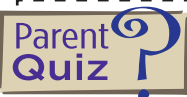
A: There will be times in high school when it will be appropriate to allow your teen more independence. But this isn't one of them.

The choices he is making now will affect his future. The courses your teen takes, or doesn't take, can affect whether and where he goes to college, and even the careers he might pursue.

Your son may be thinking only about next year. But it is important for both of you to understand the requirements for graduating from high school. You should also consider basic college admission requirements. For example, most colleges require high school graduates to have taken four years of English, four years of math, at least three years of science, three years of history, at least two years of a foreign language and one year of the Arts.

In today's job market, most well-paid jobs require at least some education or training after high school, if not a four-year college degree. The classes your teen takes now will affect his options after graduation.

Schedule a meeting with your son and his school counselor. Together, lay out a plan for the next three years. Your teen may complain now, but he'll be glad later when he has lots of great options for his future.



Are you teaching your teen how to work well with teachers?

To get the most from her classes, your teen needs to know how to work with the teachers effectively—whether she likes them or not. Are you encouraging your teen to interact with teachers in positive ways? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___ **1. Do you tell** your teen that it isn't necessary to like teachers in order to learn from them?

___ **2. Do you explain** that she should always treat teachers with courtesy, regardless of her feelings?

___ **3. Do you help** your teen consider what part her own behavior may play in any difficulties she is having?

___ **4. Do you suggest** that your teen ask to meet with teachers and her counselor to resolve issues?

___ **5. Do you role-play** with your teen so she can figure out what to say?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen work constructively with teachers. For each no, try that idea.

"Recognize that every interaction you have is an opportunity to make positive impact on others."
—Shep Hyken

Grades aren't everything

Grades matter, but they aren't the only gauge of your teen's future success. A positive attitude about learning, a strong work ethic and a balanced outlook on life are just as vital. To help keep grades in perspective:



- **Teach your teen** to value the knowledge he is gaining in his classes.
- **Help your teen** focus on doing his best, not being *the* best.
- **Don't emphasize** getting good grades so much that he feels pressured to cheat.

Source: "Parents' Values and Children's Perceived Pressure: Topical Research Series #4," The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth.

Review homework basics

When homework is weighing heavy and your teen is wondering how she'll get it all done, remind her of these simple strategies:

- **Start right away.** Your teen will finish quicker and won't waste time worrying.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Have her put her phone in another room.
- **Do the most important task first,** even if it's the hardest.

Whose views are affecting your teen's outlook?

"Influencers" have a lot of impact these days. It's vital for you to be aware of who is influencing your teen's behavior and attitudes about important things, such as school. Pay attention to:

- **Your teen's friends.** What do they do for fun? What are their future plans?
- **Social media.** Ask your teen to show you the sites he reads and the people he follows. Do they reflect his values?
- **TV, movies and streaming media.** Watch your teen's favorite shows together. Ask what he likes about them.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-103x