

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



HIGH SCHOOL

November 2021

## Ask questions that show your teen that learning is what counts

Grades are only one way to measure student success in school. While they do matter, they may not tell you as much about what and how your teen is learning as you think.

When you talk with your teen about school, don't simply ask about test scores and grade point averages. Instead, focus your conversations—and your teen's attention—on education's real purpose: learning. Show that you care about the material, what he thinks about it, and about his growing understanding of the process of learning.

Ask your teen questions about:

- **The book he's reading.** Can he give you a summary of the plot? Does it remind him of anything from his life?
- **His non-grade accomplishments.** For example, how did your teen go about solving a difficult math problem he recently faced?
- **A recent test.** Did your teen think it was an effective way to measure how well he knew the material? Why or why not?
- **Experiences that made him think.** Has anything he's read, heard or done in school made him reconsider an opinion or set a new goal?
- **What he's learning about learning.** What lessons have setbacks taught him? What new skill is he developing that he can use in the future?

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



## Help your teen start managing time in just a few minutes

It's often a challenge for busy high school students to find uninterrupted spans of time to work on assignments. But they can accomplish a great deal by making the most of a few spare minutes here and there.

Help your teen get a jump on schoolwork by managing her time. Remind her that in the 10 minutes before dinner she can:

- **Review that day's** class notes.
- **Learn the definitions** of three or four new vocabulary words or science terms.
- **Skim the next chapter** in a novel or history text.
- **Solve two or three math** problems.
- **Identify one or two sources** for an upcoming paper or project.
- **Outline the points** she wants to make in a presentation.
- **Send an email** to a teacher to ask a question.
- **Look for a video** online about a new concept she's learning.

## Watch for signs that your teen may be at risk

Experts warn that pandemic challenges have significantly increased the number of students at risk of dropping out. Be aware of these risk factors:

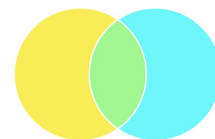
- **Frequent absences.**
- **Lack of engagement** in classes.
- **Difficulty or failure** in core subjects.

If you see them in your teen, ask the school for help. Together, make a plan to keep your student on the path to graduation.

Source: S. Addis and R. McNulty, "The Pandemic's Impact on At-Risk Students, Schools and Graduation Rates," National Dropout Prevention Center.

## Diagrams clarify thinking

A Venn diagram can help your teen organize her thoughts when she's comparing and contrasting two topics. Have her draw two overlapping circles. In a circle's outer portion, she can write the distinct features of one topic. In the overlapping area, she should write how the two topics are the same.



## Apply positive pressure

There's no question that peers have a big influence on teen behavior. But it isn't always negative. To help your teen benefit from positive peer influence:

- **Encourage him** to participate in school activities.
- **Get to know** his friends. Invite them to spend time with your family when possible.
- **Suggest that he join** a local service club or volunteer group for teens.
- **Discuss rules** and values with other parents. When your teen says "everyone does it," you'll be able to give examples of kids who don't.



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## My teen is trying, but not achieving. What can I do?

**Q:** My 10th grader does all the work for her Spanish class, but she just isn't getting it. If her grades stay this low, she'll have to repeat the class next year. She's already trying, so how can I help?

**A:** Your teen is a responsible student who is willing to put in the effort. That's terrific! What she needs to learn now is that when one strategy isn't working, it's time to look for others. Tell your teen she can rise to this challenge. Then encourage her to:

- **Meet with the teacher.** She should tell the teacher how much time she is spending on Spanish each day, and what she is doing. Can the teacher see a problem and recommend resources or strategies your teen can try?
- **Give it more time.** Study time, that is. Suggest that your teen practice recalling vocabulary words for 20 minutes each day (flash cards and apps like Quizlet can help). Then she can work on reading or verbs.
- **Figure out where the problem started.** Have your teen go back to her earliest assignments. When she hits material she doesn't remember or understand, she'll know where to start reviewing.
- **Seek extra help.** Are there student tutors available? Is there a family friend who speaks Spanish who she could practice conversation with?



## Are you preventing sleep-deprivation?

According to the CDC, seven out of 10 teens don't get enough sleep. This affects their ability to think and learn, make wise decisions and maintain physical and emotional health. Are you helping your teen get eight to 10 hours of sleep every 24 hours? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you expect** your teen to stick to a reasonable bedtime?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you promote** healthy habits, such as daily exercise, that improve sleep?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** afternoon "power naps"? Keep them under one hour.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your teen plan his time, so he won't have to stay up late doing schoolwork?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you limit** late night activities and set a device curfew one hour before bedtime?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your teen prioritize sleep. For each no, try that idea.*

"Sleep is the Swiss army knife of health. When sleep is deficient, there is sickness and disease. And when sleep is abundant, there is vitality and health."

—Matthew Walker

## Respect improves discussion

Interactions and discussions with others—in school and in society—are more productive if they are respectful. Teach your teen to:

- **Listen politely.** This involves making eye contact and not interrupting.
- **Consider tone of voice.** *How* your teen says something is as important as *what* she says.
- **Express a difference of opinion** without insulting or attacking those she disagrees with.
- **Accept a final ruling.** Explain that continuing to press her case when a parent or teacher stands firm rarely works.

## Keep an eye on homework

Remind your teen that turning in completed schoolwork on time is a priority. To help him get on top of it, encourage him to:

- **Review assignments** before leaving class and ask questions if necessary.
- **Make a to-do list** for each study session, with tasks in priority order.
- **Talk with the teacher** if homework for a class consistently takes your teen hours to do or if he is struggling.

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. _____

## Discourage 'screen stacking'

In a recent study, more than half of students surveyed reported "screen stacking"—using multiple digital devices at the same time. When teens are studying, this multitasking disrupts attention and has negative effects on learning. Screen stacking in leisure hours is linked to lower physical activity, reduced sleep and higher body mass. Encourage your teen to limit screen use to one activity on one device at a time, and to balance it with plenty of active, non-screen pursuits.

Source: University of Leicester, "Research identifies impact of teenage screen use," ScienceDaily.

### Helping Students Learn®

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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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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