

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



HIGH SCHOOL

October 2021

Prepare your teen for the future by fostering self-sufficiency

It won't be long before your teen is an adult—and that will require her to take care of herself. Developing self-sufficiency now will help her when she heads off to college or enters the workforce. It will also make her more responsible as she finishes high school.

To instill self-sufficiency:

- **Encourage your teen to brainstorm** ways she could handle issues that come up on her own.
- **Reinforce the connection** between choices and results. Before your teen acts, encourage her to think through what could happen as a result of her decision.
- **Give your teen more freedom** when she demonstrates responsible independence. When she doesn't, enforce previous limits until she can.
- **Don't rescue your teen** unless it's a matter of safety. Don't offer to drive a forgotten assignment to school or talk to a teacher for her about changing her grade.
- **Don't redo things for your teen.** Her English paper may not be as organized as you think it should be, but don't step in to "fix" it.
- **Help your teen learn to budget.** She knew she had plans for the weekend, but she spent all her money by Tuesday. Instead of giving her more, explain that she'll have to stay in or find something free to do.



Ask your teen for a tour

Research shows that teens do better in school when parents take an active interest in what they are learning. Ask your teen to introduce you to one of her classes by giving you a tour of her textbook or the class website.



Share study strategies for math & science

Families are often unsure how to help when their high schooler finds math and science courses challenging. Encourage your teen to adopt these effective daily study strategies:

- **Draw a diagram.** Making a picture of a concept or process can help your teen see how things fit together.
- **Answer sample questions** in class materials. This helps students figure out what they understand and what they need to reread or ask questions about in class.
- **Solve extra problems.** The teacher may assign only specific numbered questions. Answering *all* the questions can build students' skills and confidence.



Promote reading with a fun fiction goal

As teens get older, fewer of them read for pleasure. Many think of reading as just something they need to do for school. But a recent study shows that students who read fiction for fun, rather than to learn something, are more likely to identify as readers, to read more and to have higher verbal abilities.

If your teen is one of the many students who have stopped reading for pleasure, encourage him to set a personal reading goal for this school year. Let him pick the kinds of fiction he wants to read—popular novels, sci-fi, mysteries, whatever seems like fun to him.

If your teen is not sure what he might enjoy, suggest that he search the Teen Book Finder Database

(booklists.yalsa.net) from the Young Adult Library Services Association to find more than 4,000 popular and award-winning titles for teens.

Your teen's goal can be measured in reading time, pages read or number of books read. Help him think of a suitable reward for reaching it.

Source: S. Martin-Chang and others, "What's your pleasure? Exploring the predictors of leisure reading for fiction and nonfiction," *Reading and Writing*.

How to prevent zoning out

"Sit in the front of the room" is common advice for helping students stay alert in class. But what if seating isn't flexible or a class is online? Experts recommend that teens:



- **Review class materials** before class.
- **Arrive on time** and greet the teacher. Establishing contact can help your teen feel connected to what's going on.
- **Participate.** In order to contribute, your teen will have to listen closely.

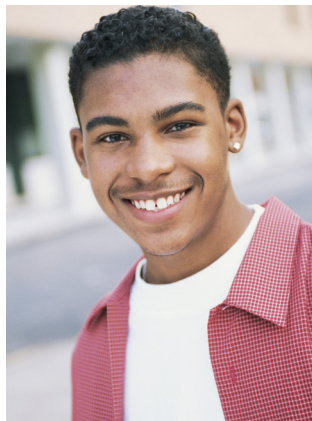
Source: Dr. Dina Kruse, "Professor Reveals Secret to Doing Well in Online Classes: Sit in the 'Front Row,'" *IlliniFamily*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Should I let my teen get a part-time job?

Q: My son wants to get a job after school to earn some spending money and have a little independence. His grades could be better, but a job might help him learn responsibility and teach him to manage his time. How can I decide if he is ready?

A: Most teens would love a little extra money. But working and going to school is a balancing act. Your teen must remember that school is his top priority. Here are some questions to ask as you consider this choice together:



- **How many hours** would your teen work? Experts believe that most teens can handle about 10 to 15 hours a week. (In fact, some may even find their grades go up.) More than that, and schoolwork starts to suffer.
- **How will your teen manage** his income? Make it clear that he won't be spending every penny on things he doesn't really need. Help him set up a savings plan for mid- and long-term goals, such as higher education.
- **Will a job keep your teen** from participating in school activities he enjoys? Participating in these increases student engagement.
- **Will a job keep your teen** from meeting family obligations or sharing family meals or traditions?
- **Will your teen still have enough time** for friends and sleep? These are also important for his well-being.

Parent Quiz

Are you helping your teen get organized?

Managing a typical high school load of assignments and responsibilities efficiently requires organization. Are you teaching your teen to use effective organization strategies? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you encourage** your teen to write assignments in a planner so she can see everything in one glance?

(or keep them handy) for use when doing assignments?

___ **2. Do you have** your teen designate a place to put items needed for school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen build essential organizational skills. For each no, try that idea.

___ **3. Do you help** your teen break big projects into smaller parts and set deadlines for each?

___ **4. Do you teach** your teen to block out time for studying on a calendar?

___ **5. Do you urge** your teen to bookmark reference materials

"Focus on being productive instead of busy."

—Tim Ferriss

Taking notes can deepen your teen's understanding

Many teachers provide handouts or bullet points about the material they cover. But your teen should still take her own notes in class. Not only will it help her pay attention, she'll be able to expand on and clarify the basic information. Share these tips:

- **Use phrases and words** instead of complete sentences.
- **Leave some blank spaces** to allow room to add ideas or details later.
- **Mark unfamiliar vocabulary** or concepts as a reminder to look them up.
- **Study class notes** each evening.

Values inform wise choices

It's helpful for teens to write down pros and cons when making a decision. But sometimes, the best decision on paper may not feel right to your teen. Teach him that it's also important to consider values. They are his responsibilities to himself.



Share your family's values with your teen, and live according to those values. Teach him that considering his values will help him decide what type of person he will become.

Ask thinking questions

You don't have to be a teacher in order to help your teen think about what he's learning. Just ask questions that take thought to answer. Here are some to ask about:

- **History:** Who or what put those events into motion? Do the events remind you of anything happening today? How?
- **Math and science:** What was new to you in this unit? How does it relate to what you already know?
- **Literature:** Who are the main characters? What motivates them? What would you do in the same situation?

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