

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

December 2024  
Vol. 32, No. 4

*still make the difference!*



## Enhance academic success with learning resolutions

**W**hen December rolls around, lots of people start to think about making resolutions. This year, encourage your high schooler make some learning resolutions.

The more specific resolutions are, the more likely your teen is to keep them up. Instead of a broad resolution, such as “I try harder better in school,” your teen’s list should involve specific ways to improve. For example:

- **I will read for 30 minutes** every day. Few teens make time to read on their own. But, reading widely and often is the most effective way to boost vocabulary and strengthen comprehension.
- **I will ask at least one question** in every class. In order to ask an informed question, your teen

will need to pay attention in class. When students pay closer attention, they become more engaged in what they’re learning—which often leads them to ask more questions—and learn more.

- **I will create a note-taking system** for each class. The most effective way to take notes depends on the content. Encourage your teen to talk with teachers to figure out the best way to record the information.
- **I will review class notes** every evening. Reading over notes after taking them allows students to clear up any information that was confusing or missing. In addition, studies show that the last thing a person reads before going to bed tends to stick in the person’s brain.

## Help your teen build a strong vocabulary



A strong vocabulary is often linked to higher academic performance. Word knowledge also

helps students communicate clearly and precisely.

Your teen may already be learning a list of specific vocabulary words in some classes. To support that learning:

- **Use flash cards.** Being quizzed on words and their definitions is effective—and a simple way for you to help your teen improve recall. Just read the definition and have your teen provide the word. Or, read the word and ask your teen to tell you two synonyms.
- **Declare a Word of the Day.** Look at your teen’s vocabulary list and choose a new word each day—or use a word-of-the-day app. Challenge family members to use this word in regular conversation.
- **Text your teen** a vocabulary word and its definition. Or, just text a word and ask for the definition. Teens spend hours looking at their phones, so texting is a great way to sneak in some learning.

# Emphasize attendance and help your high schooler stay focused



Winter break is right around the corner, and your teen can't wait. But students still need to buckle down and give their best effort in the days ahead.

The weeks leading up to winter break are just as important as any other time of the school year. Even though your teen may find it hard to get out of a warm bed in the morning, getting up and going to school is mandatory.

Evaluate your teen's attendance over the first half of the school year. Is your high schooler getting to school on time, ready to learn? Is your teen attending every class? If not, set some attendance goals together for the rest of the school year.

Then, to help your teen stay focused and engaged:

- **Ask questions** about what your teen is learning and doing in classes. Will your teen have any assignments to work on during the break?
- **Encourage** your teen to make a checklist that includes everything that needs to be completed for school before the break starts.
- **Remind** your teen that school is the number one priority. Explain that you can't get out of work one day just because it's close to the holidays. Likewise, your teen can't miss school.

**"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."**

—Nelson Mandela

# Encourage your teen to read for pleasure over the winter break



Just because they are out of school for a few weeks doesn't mean students should stop reading.

With time off from classes, your high schooler will have many free hours to pick up books—just for the fun of it!

To promote reading:

- **Challenge your teen to read** at least one book for pleasure. Suggest going to the library with friends. They can wander the stacks until they each find books they're interested in reading.
- **Have family discussions** about books. Encourage everyone in the family to read the same book, and ask your teen to lead an informal chat about it.
- **Try audiobooks.** Spark your teen's interest by listening to one in the car. Then, suggest your teen download an audiobook and listen to it while relaxing or exercising.
- **Combine** volunteering with reading. Encourage your teen to call a local nursing home and see if they need anyone to read aloud to residents. You could video your teen reading children's books for a daycare. Or, perhaps the local library needs help shelving books.
- **Watch a movie** that is based on a book—as long as your teen reads the book first! Talk about how the two are similar or different. How did the characters in the movie differ from how your teen imagined them when reading?

# Are you helping your teen control screen time?



Teens are spending more time online and in front of screens. Are you finding ways to help your teen balance screen time

with screen-free time? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you established** daily times when devices are not allowed, such as during mealtimes?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you expect** your teen to turn off digital devices that aren't needed during study time?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you enforce** a digital curfew—a time when digital devices get turned off for the evening? Charge devices for the night outside of bedrooms.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you suggest** healthy activities? When you see your teen mindlessly staring at a screen, recommend going on a walk or talking to a friend.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you set an example** by putting down your phone when talking with your teen and putting it away while you work?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are taking steps to help your teen limit time online. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
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# Alcohol use can significantly damage teens' growing brains



In one survey conducted by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 22% of high school students reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days. Even worse, 90% of all underage drinking is considered binge drinking—having four or more drinks in one sitting.

You probably know many reasons why your teen shouldn't drink alcohol. For example, teens who drink increase their risk of being involved in car accidents and engaging in sexual activity.

But did you know that alcohol can also damage the very thing that is so special about your teen's developing brain—its ability to grow and learn? Alcohol use hurts the development

of skills teens will need to thrive in school and adulthood.

Teen alcohol use can lead to:

- **Poor memory.**
- **Poor self-control.**
- **Aggressive behavior.**
- **Lower ability to solve problems.**
- **Lower visual and spatial skills.**

These are used for activities that involve sight or movement, or both. Reading, math and driving are just a few.

So make time to have a discussion about alcohol with your teen.

Don't use scare tactics. Instead, share the facts about the dangers of alcohol use and binge drinking.

*Source: Get the Facts About Underage Drinking, National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.*

**Q:** My high school senior has missed a lot of school this year—mostly because of cutting classes. Now my teen is failing two classes and wants to give up and drop out. What should I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Students who fall behind in one or more classes often begin to feel that there is no chance they can ever catch up. And while high school students can handle most school problems independently, this is a time to intervene.

The actions you and your teen take now will affect the future. By working with the school, you can help your student get back on track. Follow these steps:

- **Discuss** the importance of staying in school. Ask your teen to research the types of jobs people can get without a high school diploma. A minimum wage job may seem fine if your teen is living at home with no expenses. But how far will that money go when your teen wants to move out?
- **Reach out to teachers.** Is it possible for your teen to bring up grades before the end of the year? Can your teen make up any missed work or do any assignments for extra credit?
- **Talk with the school counselor.** Develop a plan to help your student get back on track and graduate on time. Should your teen plan to take a summer class? Does the school offer additional support for struggling students?
- **Monitor attendance.** Check in with teachers on a regular basis to ensure your teen is in school.
- **Show confidence** that your teen has what it takes to turn things around.

# Mnemonic devices can help your teen recall information easily



A *mnemonic device* is any trick that helps your teen learn and recall information.

Your teen has probably used mnemonic devices before. For example, many people recite “Thirty days hath September ...” to remember the number of days in a month.

There are many different types of mnemonic devices. Encourage your teen to experiment to find ones that suit the material. Suggest trying:

- **Acronyms.** Your teen can take the first letter from each word in a phrase or list and make a new word with those letters. For example, PEMDAS is an acronym to help students remember the order of operations in math: *parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction*.
- **Acrostics.** The first letter in each word stands for one of the items in a list. “My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Noodles” can help students remember the order of the planets in the solar system: *Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune*.
- **Rhymes.** When was Columbus's first voyage to the New World? “Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety-two.”
- **Chunking.** Since it's easier to remember small chunks of information, your teen can divide longer lists into smaller groups.
- **Chaining.** Your teen can create a silly story or image that links together pieces of information. Each item should lead to the recall of the next item.



# It Matters: Motivation

## Nurture intrinsic motivation in your teenager



Many families use rewards to motivate children. Unfortunately, when the rewards stop, sometimes the desired

behaviors also stop. That's especially important to remember when it comes to learning.

Researchers have found that students who are motivated only by the desire to earn a high grade rarely do more than the minimum they need to get by. However, when students are motivated by an inner reward, they are more likely to stick with a task and continue learning. This is called *intrinsic motivation*.

Students with intrinsic motivation learn because they're curious. They also tend to retain what they have learned. To help your teen develop this type of inner motivation:

- **Ask what your teen is learning.** Show your interest by listening and asking follow-up questions. Ask, "Can you teach me something you recently learned in one of your classes?"
- **Pique your teen's interest.** Before your teen starts an assignment, ask, "What do you hope to learn from this?" This simple question may help ignite curiosity.
- **Acknowledge progress** and prompt your teen to think about how good accomplishment feels. "You are almost finished gathering the research for your paper. You must feel really proud!"

Source: P.Y. Oudeyer and others, "Intrinsic Motivation, Curiosity, and Learning: Theory and Applications in Educational Technologies," *Progress in Brain Research*, Elsevier B.V.

## Try five strategies to spark your teen's interest in learning

**M**otivation is an essential factor in the success of high school students. It affects everything from academic achievement to personal development.

To build your teen's motivation:

1. **Link the task at hand** to your teen's personal goals. For example, writing a paper for English class will strengthen your teen's writing skills and may make writing college application essays a bit easier.
2. **Allow your teen** to take the lead when it comes to schoolwork. Discuss time management and other study strategies, but let your teen put them to use.
3. **Talk through problems** with your teen without taking responsibility for solving them.
4. **Work with your teen** to find a solution rather than imposing one. Teens are more motivated



to follow through on plans they help develop.

5. **Allow your teen** to face the consequences of actions—or inactions.

## Short power naps can give your teen's energy a boost



Tired students lack the motivation they need to tackle schoolwork and other responsibilities.

Most teens need about nine hours of sleep every day, but very few of them actually get that.

Schools start early, extracurricular activities are time-consuming, and studying takes up time in the evening. It's important to help students learn to handle these realities.

One study shows that short naps can help teens make up some of the sleep they need. A short rest of 30 to

60 minutes can help teens increase attention and reduce fatigue. Rested students are more alert and better able to focus on their studies.

If your teen seems constantly tired, encourage suggest scheduling a short sleep break after school. Experts recommend that teens take naps before 4:00 p.m., as later naps can interfere with nighttime sleep. They also advise keeping naps under 60 minutes.

Source: X. Ji and others, "The Relationship Between Midday Napping And Neurocognitive Function in Early Adolescents," *Behavioral Sleep Medicine*.