

High School Parents[®]

February 2022
Vol. 29, No.6

still make the difference!



Reinforce study skills to help your teen's developing brain

Teens' brains are still developing—and they continue to develop until they reach adulthood. During adolescence, your teen's brain is learning to think critically, plan ahead, solve problems and control impulses.

While she may be able to process more complicated and abstract information, your teen needs to practice putting these new skills to work. She also needs to develop processes for learning new information.

Help your teen reinforce what she is learning in school. Suggest that she:

- **Color-code materials** to stay organized. For example, your teen might write down her assignments in blue ink, new information in red ink and long-term project details

in green ink. Her brain will categorize the information it sees in different colors as it processes what steps to take next.

- **Use charts and diagrams** to visualize new information. Seeing facts in graphic form may make it easier for your teen to comprehend the material and recall it later.
- **Outline the steps** of long-term projects. This will help your teen keep track of her progress, what remains to be done and due dates.
- **Rely on routines.** Consistent expectations from you will help your teen stay up-to-date with homework, manage time when studying for tests and more.

Source: P. Lorain, "Brain Development in Young Adolescents," National Education Association.

Try these five parent-tested discipline tips



Student behavior affects a teacher's ability to teach, as well as your teen's ability to learn.

To support better school discipline, try these tips at home:

1. **Stay actively involved** in your teen's life. Ask about his classes. Go to his school events when possible. Meet his friends.
2. **Don't overlook drugs** and alcohol. They are a part of many teen's social activities. And they can take a serious toll on your teen's health and school performance.
3. **Involve your teen** in setting rules. He'll be more likely to follow them.
4. **Set consequences** and enforce them consistently. A consequence does not have to be severe if your teen knows that you will always impose it.
5. **Work with the school.** If a teacher contacts you with a concern, keep an open mind. Listen to all sides before making a decision or taking action.

Source: D.W. Haffner, *What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today's Challenges With Wisdom and Heart*, HarperCollins.

Have a discussion with your high schooler about cheating



Studies show that the majority of high school students cheat—and technology and remote learning have made academic dishonesty easier than ever.

Teens are under a lot of pressure to do well, and many see cheating as a way to lessen some of that pressure. As a result, anything from copying someone's homework to plagiarizing a paper has become commonplace behavior.

To discourage cheating, remind your teen that:

- **Cheating is wrong**—even though it seems like everybody does it.
- **She is only hurting herself.** There may be some short-term benefits to cheating (not having to do the homework). But your teen won't

learn the information, and she may need it later on a test or in class.

- **You'd rather she do her best** and earn a low grade than score higher by cheating.

If you find out your teen has been cheating, offer support. She may not understand the concepts being taught in class. Work together to get your teen the extra help she needs.

Source: E.M. Anderman, "Why students at prestigious high schools still cheat on exams," *The Conversation*.

"No matter how small the dishonest deed is, at the end of the day, cheating is cheating.

—Mohammad Amir

Encourage your teenager to make time for pleasure reading



High school students typically spend more time on homework than they did when they were in middle school. With the increased workload, reading for enjoyment may be pretty far down on their list of priorities.

However, research shows that teens who spend some of their free time reading benefit academically and socially. In addition, pleasure reading can:

- **Take him places.** Few people can afford to travel every place they'd like to go. But your teen can always travel through a book. And he can gain knowledge that will help him set goals to get there in person someday.

- **Make him an expert.** Reading is the best way for your teen to learn as much as possible about his areas of interest.
- **Turn him into a detective.** A cold winter day is a perfect time for your teen to grab a cup of hot chocolate and dive into a great mystery.
- **Make him laugh.** Appreciating the humor in books helps your teen develop thinking skills. It also improves his own sense of humor.
- **Introduce him to people** like himself. In books that feature characters his age, your teen is likely to encounter people that think the way he does and face the same issues he is facing.

Source: R. Martin, "Reading For Pleasure," Right for Education Foundation.

Are you helping your teen control screen time?



Teens are spending more and more time online and in front of screens. Are you finding ways to help your teen balance screen and non-screen time? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you established times** when devices are not allowed, such as during mealtimes?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to stay offline during homework time (unless he needs the internet for an assignment)?
- ___ **3. Do you enforce a digital curfew**—a certain time when digital devices must be off? They should not be in your teen's bedroom at night.
- ___ **4. Do you suggest alternatives?** When you see your teen mindlessly staring at a screen, suggest he go on a walk or listen to some music.
- ___ **5. Do you set a good example** by putting down your phone when talking with your teen and completing household tasks.

How well are you doing?

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

High School Parents
still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1291

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2022, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Researchers find a link between social media and depression



Even before the pandemic, teen depression and suicide were at a record high. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens—and has been increasing every year since 2007.

Researchers reviewed countless studies to find out what has changed in teens' lives to cause such an increase. They concluded that it may be, literally, right at your teen's fingertips.

The rise in teen depression tracks closely to the increase in the use of smart phones by teens. In particular, the time teens spend using social media on their phones can cause them to feel unhappy and anxious.

Most people try to create a positive image in their online posts. But while adults know that those people still face problems, teens don't always understand that. They may believe that everyone else is living perfect lives.

The more time teens spend online, the less happy they seem to be. Those who are online five hours or more a day are much more likely to have at least one risk factor for suicide.

Digital devices and social media aren't going away. So, talk to your teen about how social media isn't always an accurate reflection of people's lives. Then work together to limit screen time. See the quiz on page two for specific tips.

Share valuable resources, too. Let your teen know that if she or anyone she knows may be at risk of suicide, she should contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Source: "Facts About Suicide," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; J.M. Twenge and others, "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time," Clinical Psychological Science.

Q: My daughter is overweight and now that she's in high school, the other students are teasing her. She doesn't want to ride on the bus to school. She says no one will sit with her because she's too fat. She has even started cutting gym class. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Sadly, your daughter is not the only student facing this issue. Students who are overweight are often taunted by classmates.

What's happening to your daughter is bullying—which has a negative effect on her self-confidence and her academic achievement. It's important to take this issue seriously.

To support your teen:

- **Talk to her.** Sometimes, kids who are the victims of bullying start to feel that it's their fault. Let her know you're on her side and always available to listen.
- **Help her focus** on her strengths and interests. Find ways for her to spend more time on these activities. She'll feel a sense of accomplishment because she's doing something well. She may also have a chance to meet kids who share her interests.
- **Have her talk** with another adult. She should talk to the gym teacher about why she is avoiding class. The teacher needs to know what's going on so she can address it. Your teen should also talk with her counselor.
- **Make a plan** for healthy family living. Talk with a doctor to set appropriate goals. Can your family make better food choices? Can you add more activity to your day? The results won't be immediate, but over time, you and your teen may see a big change.

Help an underachieving student get back on track with three tips



It's frustrating when you know your teen has the ability to succeed but seems not to want to. This is the trap of underachievement.

Experts suggest parents do three things to motivate teens:

1. **Show your teen you care** about him as a *person*, not just a student. If a long lecture about getting better grades were the trick to motivation, there would be no such thing as an underachiever. Make time to talk to your teen about his life, watch a favorite movie with him, play a board game together. This helps him
2. **Recognize improvements.** You may not be thrilled when your teen brings home a low C on his world history quiz. But if his last quiz grade was a D, he's made progress. A pat on the back with a simple, "You brought your grade up. I believe in you!" can work wonders.
3. **Harness the power of friends.** If your teen doesn't want your help, consider enlisting the help of one of his friends. "Darren is in your history class. Maybe the two of you could study for the next test together."

feel valued—a key step in helping him feel motivated.

It Matters: Motivation

Help your teen develop intrinsic motivation



Many parents use rewards to motivate their 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 get a good 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.

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

- **Give her opportunities** to talk about what she's learning. Show your interest by listening and asking questions. Challenge her to teach you something she's learned in one of her classes.
- **Pique her interest.** Before she begins an assignment, ask her what she hopes to learn from it. This simple question may help ignite her curiosity.
- **Acknowledge progress** and prompt her to think about how it feels to accomplish something. "Wow, 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.

Boost motivation by helping teens get the sleep they need

Tired students lack the motivation they need to tackle schoolwork and other responsibilities. Most teenagers need about nine hours of sleep every day, but very few of them actually get that.

Schools start early. Athletics and other extracurricular activities are time-consuming. Homework takes up time in the evening. As a result, many teens live their lives in a constant state of sleep deprivation.

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 their attention and reduce fatigue. That means they are more alert and better able to focus on their studies.

If your teen seems constantly tired, encourage him to schedule 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*.

Which motivation techniques work—and which fall short?



Some of the techniques parents rely on to motivate their teens can actually have the opposite effect. Here are some dos and don'ts to keep in mind:

- **Do link your teen's personal goals** to the task at hand. For example, writing the paper for her English class will strengthen her writing skills and may make writing college application essays a bit easier.
- **Do talk through problems** with your teen without taking responsibility for solving them.

- **Do work with your teen** to find a solution rather than imposing one on her. Teens are more motivated to follow through on a plan they helped develop.
- **Don't nag or lose your temper.** It doesn't work, and it creates distance between you and your teen.
- **Don't always bail your teen out.** It's important for her to face the consequences of her actions—or inactions.

Source: J. Nelsen, Ed.D. and L. Lott, M.A., *Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Empowering Your Teens and Yourself Through Kind and Firm Parenting*, Three Rivers Press.