High School
Parents
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still make the difference!



Engage with your teen's learning this school year

When your child was in middle and elementary school, it was probably fairly easy to understand what he was learning and help with assignments. However, now that he's in high school, you face two challenges:

1. **Adolescence.** Your teen is probably less likely to talk about his classes and his day than he was when he was younger.
2. **Advanced classes.** Even if you get your teen to open up, you might not understand a word he's saying about his chemistry class.

Staying involved in your teen's education helps him learn. But how can you do it? You can:

- **Talk about school.** Find out who his favorite teacher is. Ask which class he finds the most interesting.
- **Maintain high expectations.** One-third of high school students say their parents have no idea how they are doing in school. Check on your teen's progress and let him know you expect him to always do his best.
- **Attend school events**—in person or online. This shows your teen that his education is important to you.
- **Be familiar** with your teen's testing, assignment and project schedules. Even if you don't understand exactly what he's being tested on, saying, "Isn't your calculus test tomorrow?" reminds him that you are paying attention.

Source: S. Blaney, *Please Stop the Roller Coaster!: How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride,* ChangeWorks Publishing.

Discuss the dangers of skipping class



Many teens think skipping a class isn't a big deal—especially after all of the pandemic-related learning disruptions this past year. However, studies show that students who skip classes:

- **Fall behind** because they no longer understand the topics being taught.
- **Feel disconnected** from the school.
- **Are more likely** to consider dropping out of high school.
- **Are less likely** to enroll in higher education.

Insist your teen attend every class, every day. Be sure to:

- **Make attendance** a priority in your family. Talk to your teen about why it is important.
- **Contact the teacher** if you suspect your teen may be skipping a class. If your teen knows you will check up on her, she will be more likely to stay in school.
- **Remind your teen** that going to school is the law—skipping class is considered truancy.

Source: *Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence* , Attendance Works.

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Help your teenager uncover hidden strengths and interests



High school gives teens lots of opportunities to learn more about themselves. To help your teen discover her strengths and interests, encourage her to:

- **Read.** Reading a variety of material exposes your teen to new ideas and pursuits. Suggest that she read anything and everything she can.
- **Talk to people.** Tell your teen to ask people about their jobs. She should ask what they like best about them. Do any of the jobs sound interesting to her? Your teen might also ask her friends about their hobbies and interests.
- **Try new things.** The easiest way for your teen to find out if she's good at something is simply to try it. Challenge her to join a new organization or activity. She could volunteer or sign up for a class online.
- **Research.** Suggest that your teen go online and search for hobbies and careers that seem interesting to her. She may find something she'd like to try.

"Try not to get lost in comparing yourself to others. Discover your gifts and let them shine!"

—Jennie Finch

Teach healthy relationship skills so your teen can focus on school



Many teens begin to date once they are in high school. Unfortunately, some teens don't really know what healthy relationships look like.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year. And only 33% of those teens tell anyone about the abuse. That's why it's vital for parents to know the signs.

When teens are in unhealthy relationships, they often:

- **Do poorly in school** or miss school because they don't feel safe.
- **Doubt their self-worth,** feelings and decision-making ability.
- **Become depressed** and anxious.
- **Think about suicide.**
- **Engage in unhealthy behaviors,** such as drug and alcohol use.

Talk with your teenager about the importance of mutual respect. Explain that people who are in healthy relationships:

- **Can talk openly** to each other. Communication is the key to a good relationship.
- **Work together** to make decisions. They also support and balance each other.
- **Divide their time** between their relationship and their friends and family. A relationship where two people never see anyone but each other isn't healthy.
- **Feel free to be themselves.** People in a healthy relationship accept each other's differences.

Source: "Teen Dating Violence," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



Teens often face some pretty tough situations—from encouragement to take risks at a party to feeling pressured by a friend to skip a class. Are you helping your teen face difficult issues head on? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you talk about** difficult situations your teen may face *before* they occur?

___**2. Do you role-play** different ways to say *no*? "My mom would ground me for life!" is a favorite standby.

___**3. Have you told** your teen you expect him to be honest with you—especially about serious issues?

___**4. Do you talk** to your teen about the values that are important in your family?

___**5. Do you create** everyday opportunities to talk with your teen? Casual conversations often pave the way for more serious talks.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are having positive talks with your teen about tough issues. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

High School Parents still make the difference!

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Four ways to support your teen's transition to high school



The transition to high school—and to a normal school year after COVID—is a pretty big deal. In high school, classes are harder, and teachers have higher expectations. And what about your teen's friends? Some may be in other classes and some may be at other schools. How will he ever fit in?

To support your teen as he goes through this change:

1. **Help him create a schedule.** Your teen will need to spend more time on schoolwork. More extracurricular activities may be offered this year, requiring more time. Work with your teen to set a schedule that includes all of his responsibilities. Encourage him to keep track of everything on a calendar.
2. **Establish some tech downtime.** Don't let your teen keep his phone in his room when he goes to bed. He can charge it elsewhere. Don't allow phones at the kitchen table, either. Use mealtimes for family conversation.
3. **Promote good study habits.** The first marking period is critical. Help your teen set a regular study time. Make sure he regularly checks his grades on quizzes and assignments. If he feels like he's falling behind, encourage him to talk to his teachers about getting help right away.
4. **Ask him about school every day.** How does your teen feel he is adjusting to the social aspects of high school? Let him know you are available to talk.

Show your high schooler how to evaluate online material



The internet brings a world of information right to your teen's fingertips. However, information available online is not regulated for quality or accuracy. That means some of it is just junk.

Whether it's for a school assignment or for her personal information, it's vital that your teen develop digital literacy—the ability to asses the level of accuracy, reliability and bias of online sources.

Teach your teen to:

- **Use a variety of search engines.** As your teen checks out different sites, she should remember that many search engines are "pay for play." In other words, people pay to have their site pop up first.
- **Ask questions.** When reading *anything* online, she should ask herself: Is the purpose of the site to sell a product or agenda? Where do the "facts" come from?
- **Check out other sites.** Your teen should use a search engine to find other sites on the same subject. Comparing two or three sites side by side can help her see the limits of each.
- **Be wary of health information.** Many sites are in business to sell products. Your teen should talk to her doctor about medical information she finds online.
- **Remember** that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Source: J. Breakstone and others, *Students' Civic Online Reasoning: A National Portrait*, The Stanford History Education Group, Stanford University.

Q: My teen has a bad habit of putting things off. If she has a big paper due, she waits until the night before to get started—sometimes until very late on the night before. She's very bright, but her grades suffer. How can I help her break this habit?

Questions & Answers

A: We all put some things off from time to time. But when it gets to be a habit, as it has for your teen, procrastination can have serious consequences.

Help your teen think about why she puts things off. She may be afraid of failing. She may simply like the thrill of dashing something off at the last minute. She may be a perfectionist ("What if I try and don't get an A?"). Or maybe she simply doesn't feel like starting things until she has no choice.

Whatever the cause, she needs to work on changing this habit before she gets to college or the workplace.

Start by helping your teen break up those large, tough projects into smaller chunks. Then have her set deadlines for each chunk. Yes, she may still wait until close to the deadline to finish each part, but bit by bit she'll get the job done. And once she gets started on a project, she'll find that it's often easier to keep working.

As she finishes each task, she should give herself a small reward. Perhaps she can spend some time reading about a favorite topic after she's finished her work for the night.

Finally, make sure she sees each assignment in terms of her long-term goals. Learning how to study and manage her time wisely will help her with her goal of being successful in school and beyond.

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It Matters: Building Responsibility

Expect your teen to know & follow all school rules



If your teen is caught driving faster than the speed limit, saying, "I didn't know" won't keep the police officer from giving him a ticket. The same is true for school rules. As the new year begins, your teen needs to become aware of the "rules of the road" that affect him during the school day.

Make sure you and your teen understand rules about:

- **Attendance.** What are the consequences for skipping a class? For being late? If your teen is sick, how should you let the school know? Also, find out what types of absences are considered excused and what types are considered unexcused—along with their consequences.
- **Clothing.** Does your teen know what he can—and can't—wear to class? You don't want to spend money on clothes that your teen can never wear in school, so make sure he finds out!
- **Schoolwork.** At the beginning of the school year, teachers explain their policies about assignments and late work. And since rules may vary from class to class, it's especially important for your teen to pay attention.
- **Technology.** Whether your teen's classes are in person or online, make sure he is aware of the consequences for device misuse. Is he required to have his camera on during remote classes? Is he allowed to bring mobile devices into the classroom? Emphasize to your teen that he should never use his phone or tablet to cheat.

Teens should take responsibility for developing healthy habits

Your teen can't learn if she's too groggy to concentrate. That's why establishing healthy habits is critical to her success in school. A commitment to nutrition, exercise and sleep will help her start each school day ready to learn.

Encourage your teen to:

1. **Eat healthy** and well-balanced meals and snacks. She will benefit from nutritious foods such as whole grains, produce and lean protein. She should eat breakfast every day, even if it is a granola bar or piece of toast in one hand and a banana in the other.
2. **Get regular exercise.** A strong body, fueled by regular physical activity, will help her stay alert during the school day. Your teen should make sure she gets some sort of exercise every day. Even a short walk after classes end can reduce stress and help her be ready to tackle her assignments.



3. **Get a good night's sleep**. Your teen needs plenty of rest in order to function properly throughout the school day. According to the Centers for Disease Control, teens need 8-10 hours of sleep each 24-hour period.

Source: K.T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence,* Teachers College Press and the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring.

Self-discipline can help your teen develop responsibility



Research shows that self-discipline has a positive impact on students' grades, test scores and attendance.

To promote self-discipline:

- **Avoid rescuing your teen.** If he forgets to do an assignment, let him experience the consequences. He needs to learn how to think ahead and solve problems.
- **Avoid doing things** for your teen that he can do for himself. He needs to start learning how to take care of himself.
- **Encourage your teen** to participate in activities that develop self-discipline. Playing a musical instrument requires your teen to practice regularly. Team sports require your teen to show up for training on time and give it his all.

Source: A. Duckworth and M. Seligman, "Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents," *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.