

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Dr. Selma Wells

*still make the difference!*



## Promote persistence for academic & personal success

**S**ometimes it seems easier to give up on a tough assignment than to push through and complete it. However, that won't get your teen very far in life. Life is full of difficult jobs and tasks, so it will benefit her to develop persistence as soon as she can.

Help your teen brainstorm different ways to solve problems if what she's doing isn't working. Challenge her to see difficult assignments through to the end.

To encourage your teen:

- **Notice her progress.** Say things like, "You're really coming along with this project."
- **Show her how** to cheer herself on. Positive self-talk, such as, "I am going to do a great job on this," can help your teen through difficult tasks.

- **Be a role model.** If you've been putting off a big chore, decide to do it. Say, "Today, I am going to work on this until I finish." Then keep your word.
- **Offer support.** Don't take over. Just ask questions to help her get back on track.
- **Let her plan breaks.** A five-minute breather after she writes the first paragraph can restore her energy for the second.
- **Treat her** to something special when she finishes a challenging task. You could watch a movie together or cook a fun dinner. When your teen conquers a tough task she deserves to celebrate!

Source: M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.

## Gratitude is key for your teen's success



It's a fact: Students who are grateful experience higher academic interest, grades and extra-curricular involvement.

Suggest that your teen keep a gratitude journal. This will give him a permanent record of the many good things in his life—and build his writing skills at the same time.

To reap the most benefits from keeping a journal, experts recommend writing in it regularly, at least once a week.

Your teen can write about:

- **A relationship** that helped him grow.
- **An opportunity** that he had this week.
- **Something great** that happened to him or a friend.
- **A personal attribute** he's glad he has.

The journal can also become an action list. If your teen realizes that he's grateful for having a funny history teacher, he may decide to look for the humor in other situations he faces.

Source: E. DeRoche, "Gratitude: At Work, Home and School," Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools.

## Emphasize attendance and help your high schooler stay focused



Winter break is right around the corner, and your teen can't wait. But is he willing to buckle down and give his best effort these last few weeks?

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, he still has to wake up and go to class.

To help your teen stay focused and engaged:

- **Evaluate** how his attendance has been over the first half of the school year. Is he starting his classes on time every day, ready to learn? Is he attending *all* of his classes? If not, help him set some attendance goals for the rest of the school year.

- Ask questions about what he's doing in each of his classes. Does he have assignments that he'll need to work on over while school is out?
- **Encourage** him to make a checklist of everything he still has to do for school and extracurricular activities before the break starts. This will help him stay organized.
- **Remind** him that school is his top priority. Explain that you can't get out of work one day just because it's close to the holidays; likewise, he can't miss school.

**"Time flies over us,  
but leaves its shadow  
behind."**

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

## Alcohol use can significantly damage teens' growing brains



According to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 29% of high school students said they drank alcohol in the past 30 days, and 14% of those teens admitted to 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 talk to your teen. Don't use scare tactics. Instead, share the facts about the dangers of alcohol use and binge drinking.

**Source:** *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Are you boosting your teen's civic responsibility?



Responsible students follow rules and respect others. They take care of their communities and also tend to achieve

in school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are encouraging civic responsibility:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you discuss** rights and responsibilities with your teen? Teens always want to talk about their rights—but these come with responsibilities.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you expect** your teen to be honest? Honesty is an important part of civil interaction.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk** about making the right choice even if it isn't the most popular thing to do?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** with your teen about current events and ask her opinion about them?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your teen to take action if she reads about an issue that concerns her? She can write a letter to the editor or volunteer.

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you're helping your teen become a community asset. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Five strategies keep teens reading 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, winter break is the perfect time to encourage your teen to pick up books—just for the fun of it!

To promote reading:

1. **Challenge your teen to read** at least one book for pleasure. Suggest that he invite friends to go to the library with him. They can wander the stacks until they each find books they're interested in reading.
2. **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.
3. **Try audiobooks.** Spark your teen's interest by listening to one in the car. Then, encourage him to download one on his phone. He can listen while relaxing or exercising.
4. **Suggest a place to volunteer.** Encourage your teen to call a local nursing home and see if they need anyone to read aloud to residents. He could video himself reading children's books for a daycare. Or, perhaps the local library needs help shelving books.
5. **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?

# Sleep is critical to your teen's ability to concentrate and learn



Your teen may think she's able to pay attention in class without getting a proper night's sleep, but that's far from

the case! A lack of sleep will reduce her ability to learn, listen, concentrate and solve problems.

Share these research-based facts with your teen:

- **Teens need 8 to 10 hours** of sleep each night to function well the next day. Only 15 percent of teens report getting 8.5 hours of sleep each night.
- **A consistent sleep schedule** helps teens feel less tired. Your teen may be tempted to sleep until noon on weekends, but remind her that it only makes waking up harder on Monday morning. Create a routine for going to bed and waking up.
- **Nothing replaces good sleep.** Vitamins, pills and drinks with caffeine are not substitutes for a night of restful sleep.
- **Sleep deprivation** causes the same impairment as having a blood alcohol content of .08 percent. This means that driving while sleepy is dangerous.
- **A lack of sleep** causes many teens to feel depressed and stressed.
- **Using technology,** eating, drinking and exercising in the hours right before bedtime makes it harder to sleep. Suggest quiet, calm activities that will relax her brain. Taking a warm bath or shower right before bedtime can help your teen's body relax and get into sleep mode.

Source: E. Suni, "Teens and Sleep," Sleep Foundation, OneCare Media, LLC.

**Q:** My son is failing two classes. He has missed a lot of school this year—sometimes because he cut classes. Now he says he just 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. But if you work with the school, you can help your son get back on track. The steps you and your teen take now will affect his entire future.

Be sure to:

- **Talk with his teachers.** Find out if it is possible for him to bring his grades up before the end of the year. Can he make up any missed work? Can he do any assignments for extra credit? If he struggles with the class material, could he work with a tutor to get caught up?
- **Talk with his counselor.** Together, develop a plan to help your son get back on track so he can graduate on time. Should he plan to take a summer class? Find out if there is any additional support available for struggling students.
- **Help your son see** why staying in school is so important. Have him research the types of jobs he can get without a high school diploma. A minimum wage job may seem fine now if he's living at home. But how far will that money go when he wants to move out, drive a car and have a life of his own?
- **Monitor his attendance.** Your son needs to make a serious commitment to be in *every* class *every* day. Check in with his teachers on a regular basis to ensure your son is in school.



# It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

## Should your teen listen to music while studying?



Some students listen to music almost non-stop. But should your teen listen while she's studying? One reading

comprehension study gives a clear answer: *No*.

Researchers in Cardiff, Wales, set out to find answers to several questions. How does listening to music affect learning something new? Does it matter what type of music students listen to while studying? Would it make a difference if the music had lyrics?

Students were divided into groups. They were asked to learn new material under different conditions. Then they took a test on what they had learned. The answers were clear and consistent. Students who studied in silence did much better. Their grades were up to 60 percent higher than those of students who listened to music.

Whether students heard pop, rap, hip hop or heavy metal made almost no difference. It's not the type of music—it's the act of listening. When students are listening, their brains don't focus efficiently on learning.

The students who studied in silence said they had fewer distractions. It was easier for them to concentrate on the task at hand.

There are times when listening to music can be helpful. For example, it might relax your teen before a test. But mastering new content is hard. It takes focus and attention. So to make the most of study time, make sure your teen turns off the music.

**Source:** N. Perham and H. Currie, "Does listening to preferred music improve reading comprehension performance?" *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## Your teen can conquer math tests with these test-taking tips

Even students who have done their homework and studied can get nervous when they take a math test. To help your teen do his best, share these math test-taking strategies:

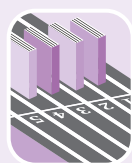
- **Look it over.** Your teen should take a minute or two to look over the whole test. Have him put a check beside problems he knows he can solve.
- **Start with the easy ones.** Getting them out of the way will leave more time for the tougher ones. It will also build his confidence.
- **Use the clock.** In a 50-minute class period, your teen should not spend 10 minutes working on a question that's only worth five points. He shouldn't spend too much time on one problem if it means he won't get to the others.
- **Show all work.** This shows the teacher what your teen does know.



Even if he doesn't get the right answer, the teacher may award him some credit.

- **Don't waste time erasing.** Instead, he should cross through the work he wants the teacher to ignore.
- **Ask, "Does this make sense?"** about every answer.

## Share strategies to help your high schooler get organized



Your teen has a big test tomorrow and she can't find her notes. She may have left them somewhere. Or, did she accidentally throw them away? Either way, she doesn't have them—and she needs to use them to study.

Being organized is vital to your teen's school success. To promote organization, teach her to:

- **Schedule a Friday clear out.** She should throw away trash and file school papers.
- **Organize her study space.** If she can't find her math book, she'll have to waste time looking for it.
- **Use sticky notes.** She can place one on the spine of each book she needs to bring home. She can also use them to jot down important reminders.
- **Prepare for tomorrow tonight!** Have your teen take time each night to prepare for the next day. She can make her lunch, replenish her supplies and place her gym shoes by the door.