

High School Parents®

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Roanoke County Schools



Encourage your teen to make specific learning resolutions

Every time the first of January rolls around, people make resolutions that they often abandon just a few weeks later. This year, help your teen make some learning resolutions that will stick!

The more specific his goals are, the more likely your teen is to attain them. Instead of a broad resolution like “Do better in school,” your teen’s goals should involve specific ways to improve. For example:

- **I will read for 30 minutes** every day. Very few teens make time to read for pleasure. But the best way to boost vocabulary and comprehension is to read widely and often.
- **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. By paying closer attention, he’ll be more engaged in what he’s learning—and that will likely lead him to ask more questions—and learn more.

- **I will create a note-taking system** for each class. The way your teen takes notes in history may be different from the way he does it in chemistry. Encourage him to talk with his teachers to figure out the best way to record the information they discuss.
- **I will review class notes** every night before bed. Studies show that the last thing a person reads before going to bed tends to stick in the person’s brain.

Promote long-term thinking in your teen



Teens can be impulsive. They often react quickly and, for many, thinking long-term can be a challenge. Yet the most valuable things in life require planning, effort and persistence.

Here are a few simple ways to foster long-term thinking in your teen:

- **When she can’t figure something out right away**, talk about the rewards of persistence. Remind her that most of the things she has learned how to do—from riding a bike to driving a car—have taken time.
- **When she talks about a big project for school**, talk about time management. Help her break the project into smaller steps with individual deadlines—set by working backward from the final due date.
- **When she shows you the latest gotta-have-it fashion or digital device**, teach her about financial planning. How much does it cost? How can she save money for it? Help her create a plan to get what she wants.

These surprising statistics may motivate teens to stay in school



High school graduates make more money than high school dropouts—on average, about \$8,000 more each year. But if money alone isn't enough to motivate your teen to stay in school, share these other facts.

High school graduates:

- **Live longer** than high school dropouts.
- **Are more likely to be employed.**
- **Are less likely to commit crimes** or require social services.
- **Are more likely to contribute** to their communities by voting and volunteering.

Getting your teen to stay in school can be as simple as helping her understand how important her

education is. Students don't always see the big picture—the effect that finishing high school has on the rest of their lives. So talk about what your teen can achieve with education, and how much you appreciate your own education—or why you wish you had learned more.

Source: “High School Graduation Facts: Ending the Dropout Crisis,” America’s Promise Alliance.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

—Nelson Mandela

Your teen can use mnemonic devices to remember facts



A *mnemonic device* is any trick that helps your teen learn and recall information. If he's ever recited, “Thirty days hath September ...” to remember the number of days in a month, he was using a mnemonic device.

There are several different types of mnemonic devices. Encourage your teen to experiment and find ones that work best for him. He can try:

- **Acronyms.** Your teen can take the first letter from each word he wants to remember and make a new word with those letters. For example, HOMES is a classic acronym for remembering the five Great Lakes: *Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior.*
- **Acrostics.** The first letter in each word stands for one of the items

on the memory list. “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” is a way to remember the order of operations in math: *parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction.*

- **Rhymes.** When was Columbus's first voyage to the New World? “Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety-two.”
- **Music.** Have your teen set key facts to a popular song and he'll never get it out of his head.
- **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 him to recall the next item.

Do you help your teen focus on one task at a time?



Teens are multitaskers. They send text messages while listening to music and watch funny videos while studying for history. Studies show that teens have trouble shutting out distractions. So they may be doing several things at once, but none of them well.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your teen concentrate on the task at hand:

- ___ **1. Do you have your teen turn off** the TV, phone and other devices during study time?
- ___ **2. Do you sometimes check to** see how many different things your teen is doing while he is studying?
- ___ **3. Do you set an example by** focusing on one thing at a time?
- ___ **4. Does your family have a screen** time curfew? After a certain hour, all devices must be turned off.
- ___ **5. Do you encourage your teen** to read? Reading strengthens the brain's ability to focus.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are encouraging concentration. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Four ways to support your teen's critical thinking skills



According to a survey of college professors, many high school graduates are not prepared for the expectations they'll face in college. A lack of critical thinking skills is one of the reasons.

Of the instructors surveyed, 82 percent found that fewer than half of their students had the critical thinking skills they needed to be successful.

To address this issue, high school teachers are focusing more on deeper learning and critical thinking. This means your teen will not only be asked to recall a fact—but also to understand how that fact relates to other ideas.

To support your teen's developing thinking skills:

1. Challenge him to form opinions and defend them. For example, if your teen thinks there should be a

stop sign in front of the school, ask him why he feels that way. Then, encourage him to write a letter to local authorities outlining his ideas.

2. Help him see all sides of an issue. Say, "I understand why *you* feel that way. But there are other people who might say ..."

3. Give him the reasons behind the limits you have set. For example, studies show that more teens are injured in car accidents after 9 pm. What a great reason to establish a driving curfew!

4. Talk about the advertisements when you're watching TV. How are they trying to persuade viewers? Are they effective?

Source: D. Schaffhauser, "Survey: Most Profs Find HS Grads Unready for College or Work," *Campus Technology*, 1105 Public Sector Media Group.

Q: My daughter would make a great secret agent. If she does not want you to know something, she will not talk. Unfortunately, last year she kept the secret that she was in danger of failing math until it was almost too late to do anything. How can I get her to open up about things that are really important?

Questions & Answers

A: When students get to high school, it's not always easy to find out what's going on in their classes. You are right to make the effort. Talking about school is important for you and your daughter.

However, as you learned last year, teens don't always have the best judgment about what you need to know. So this year, work to open up communication with your son—and with the school.

Interestingly, one solution may be to get your daughter to open up about things that are not so important. Involve her in a household project. Take her for a drive. Go for a walk. When the two of you are focused on some other task, conversation may come more easily.

Talk about everyday things. And be sure to talk *with*, not *at* your teen. Try to do at least as much listening as talking. Let her take the lead in the conversation. If she wants to talk about a new show she watched, let that be the subject.

Meanwhile, stay in touch with the school. Is there an online gradebook you can monitor? Contact your teen's teachers if you have concerns. Your teen may never be a chatterbox, but you can find out what you need to know.

Talk to your teen about how to combat cyberbullying



Teens spend much of their time texting their friends and sharing posts on social media sites.

Not surprisingly, these are the channels that many bullies use to harass other students. Studies show that 60 percent of students see frequent bullying online—and only 1 in 10 teen victims will inform a trusted adult.

Whether it's a disrespectful comment posted on a photo or a rumor that's been retweeted several times, cyberbullying can have a devastating effect on students' self-esteem and academic performance.

Teens play an important role in defeating cyberbullying. Teach your teen to:

- **Delete content** on his social media that is mean-spirited or makes fun of others. He should not share negative comments with friends. Bullying escalates when others help spread the message.
- **Unfollow or block users** who repeatedly post harmful or negative things about others.
- **Report bullying** to a trusted adult. Teens often operate under a code of silence. But telling an adult can help bring the situation to an end.
- **Stop and think** before he posts something that could hurt someone.
- **Talk with other students.** Your teen should let his friends know that he thinks bullying is uncool.

Source: "11 Facts About Cyber Bullying," DoSomething.org.

It Matters: Building Character

Help your teen reap the benefits of volunteering



Educators know that community service has significant academic benefits for students.

It gives students an opportunity to apply what they've learned to real human needs.

Volunteering also helps students gain valuable life experience and skills—which can put them on the path to their future careers.

While many people think about volunteering over the holidays, community service should be a year-round priority. Ask your teen to research and select an organization that your family can help.

As a family you could:

- **Support an organization.** Some families give a monetary gift to a charity they support. But that isn't the only way to help. Find out if you can stuff envelopes for a group working on an issue your teen cares about. Could you organize a collection of canned goods for a food pantry? Perhaps you could help get the word out about a special cause on social media.
- **Prepare and serve a meal.** A local soup kitchen or homeless shelter may need volunteers to prepare, serve or deliver meals.
- **Become a pen pal.** Is there a nursing home nearby? Ask if there are any residents who do not receive regular mail.
- **Give a gift anonymously.** Perhaps your teen knows someone who is going through a rough time. Leaving a small plant or a batch of cookies at their doorstep could lift that person's spirits.

Teaching teens values is easy with this seven-step process

Teachers want students to be responsible and respectful. And parents want their kids to have strong values. But how can you teach values?

Try this seven-step process:

1. **Explain.** Talk about the values that matter to your family.
2. **Examine.** Look for news stories that demonstrate values in action.
3. **Exhibit.** If you want your teen to be honest, be honest yourself.
4. **Expect.** Tell your teen that you expect her to respect your family's values, even if her own differ.
5. **Experience.** If you want your teen to be compassionate, give her experiences where she can put that value into practice.
6. **Encourage.** When your teen demonstrates one of your family's values, acknowledge it: "Thanks for being honest and showing me your English test grade."



7. **Evaluate.** Talk about times when it was hard to put values into practice. Together, brainstorm ways to handle these situations.

Source: T. Lickona, *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*, Touchstone Books.

Self-confidence sets your high school student up for success



When students are confident in their abilities, they often do better in school because they believe they can accomplish goals and overcome problems.

To give your teen a strong sense of his abilities, show him that you think he is a capable person. Be sure to:

- **Notice his accomplishments.** So your teen didn't get an A on his last test—he got a B instead. That still means he mastered a majority of the material! Mention how proud you are that his studying

paid off. And remind him that the mistakes he made are great learning opportunities.

- **Give him chores** and other responsibilities at home.
- **Avoid unconstructive criticism.** Instead, focus on what your teen does well.
- **Let him make** as many decisions for himself as he can without risking safety.
- **Ask him to help a friend** or sibling with something, such as an assignment. Helping another person will give your teen a sense of pride.