

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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## Show your high schooler how to get organized for exams

**T**here's probably only one thought on high school students' minds right now: summer! However, for many kids, final exams stand between them and that nice, long break. So encourage your teen to start preparing for those exams sooner rather than later.

To get a jump start, recommend that your teen:

- **Talk with teachers.** Many teachers will offer hints about what to focus on when studying. A comment like, "Remember how often we referred to the concepts in Chapter 6," means your teen should give it extra attention.
- **Organize class materials.** Your teen should make sure notes, past tests and assignments are in one place and in an order that makes sense.

- **Create a study plan.** Most tests require serious study and practice applying concepts. Encourage your teen to use a calendar to block out study time as well as time to work on assignments or projects that will be due before the end of the school year.
  - **Stock up on materials.** Ask what your high schooler needs for studying—paper, markers, index cards, sticky notes, highlighters. Replenish supplies now if they are running low.
- Then, do your part to help your teen get ready for those final exams! Minimize distractions during study time and make sure your teen gets a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast before tests.

## Share tips to help your teen maintain focus



Some students begin to lose momentum as the school year comes to an end.

To spark motivation, encourage your teen to:

1. **Follow a consistent routine** that includes doing schoolwork and studying. Doing schoolwork means completing assigned work. Studying means making an effort to learn and remember the material. Make sure your teen allows enough time for both each day.
2. **Manage time.** Does your teen always put things off until the last minute? Demonstrate how to break down those big papers and projects into smaller, more manageable parts.
3. **Take regular breaks.** Have your teen set schedule 10-minute breaks for every one hour of work. Breaks help prevent burnout and support your teen's well-being.
4. **Address concerns head on.** Is your teen worried about a grade in a class or a particular assignment? Rather than just hoping for the best, suggest that your teen talk with the teacher. Taking action is key!

# Talk to your high schooler about making difficult decisions



Sometimes, it's easy to do the right thing. If everyone is driving safely down a road, there's less temptation for your teen to speed.

However, there are other times when it's not so easy to do the right thing. Your teen is taking a test and a friend asks for the answer to one of the questions. Does your teen give the answer to the friend?

It's during those hard times when it's even more important for your teen to be prepared to do the right thing. Sometimes, the choices involved may seem unimportant, such as whether to get up when the alarm clock beeps or roll over and miss a class. But even these minor choices can have big consequences. If your teen misses

class today, it will be that much harder to catch up tomorrow.

Talk with your teen about these hard moments. Say that everyone has to make choices. Often, by choosing the option that seems harder at the time (getting up and heading to class), your teen will actually have an easier time in the future.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside Books.

**"It is very important to know who you are. To make decisions. To show who you are."**

—Malala Yousafzai

# Teach your teen to follow four steps after making a mistake



While it may be comforting for students to hear, "Don't worry. You'll learn from this mistake," that's not always the case.

Sometimes, students just keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

In order to really learn from mistakes, students need to think about them. Here are four steps your teen can take to do just that:

- 1. Look at what was right.** Say, "Your test wasn't perfect. But let's see where you succeeded." Pointing out that all is not lost motivates students to take the next step.
- 2. Figure out what went wrong.** It's hard to fix a problem if you don't know what caused it. Sometimes, the solution is easy: *I didn't follow the directions.* But other times, it requires more analysis.

## 3. Take steps to correct the problem.

Perhaps your teen didn't learn all of the content. In that case, your teen may need to ask the teacher for help. Encourage your teen to work with the teacher to create a plan outlining what to do differently next time. Express confidence in your teen's ability to improve.

## 4. Apply knowledge to a new situation.

For example, have your teen try a problem that is similar to the ones missed on the test. After stopping at the place where the mistake was made, your teen should try something different. Successfully solving the problem will prove that your teen really did learn from the mistake.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.

# Are you stressing the value of your teen's effort?



Every student is capable of a "personal best." Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are

encouraging your teen's best effort:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you comment** on your teen's work ethic? "I'm impressed that you decided to spend the weekend working on your research paper!"

\_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to take pride in effort and work? "You must feel great knowing that you put the time in to strengthening your conclusion. It's so persuasive."

\_\_\_ **3. Do you celebrate** the progress your teen makes as the result of effort? "That extra 30 minutes of studying each night has really paid off."

\_\_\_ **4. Do you avoid** focusing too much on grades, as long as your teen is working hard?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you model** consistent and diligent effort? "I am working on my report for work each day this week so I can get it completed by Friday."

## How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are encouraging your teen to strive. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Outdoor activities can lower your teen's stress and boost learning



Research shows that being outside is a natural stress reliever—and the wonders of nature can motivate teens to learn.

Here are a few outdoor learning activities your teen can try this summer:

- **Go on a photo scavenger hunt.** Suggest that your teen make a list of things to photograph. Examples might include a cumulus cloud, a spider web, a reflection in water and a tree's shadow.
- **Create a map** of a park or nature area. Include trails, streams, water crossings, fallen logs, etc.
- **Identify plants and animals** using a field guide or an app like Seek. Then, go outside at night to identify

planets, stars and constellations. Your child can use a star chart or an app such as Sky Map or Night Sky.

- **Use the sun as a tool for science and engineering.** Encourage your teen to research how to make a sundial with sidewalk chalk. Or, have your teen look up how to turn a pizza box into a solar oven!
- **Make art.** Encourage your teen to create sun prints by arranging leaves on colored construction paper and leaving the project in the sun for a few hours. Your teen can also squash berries to make paint.

Source: K. Weir, "Nurtured by Nature," *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

# Summer is a great time for rising seniors to work on college essays



For many students, senior year means it's time for college applications. Students can reduce the stress

of the application process by getting their essays written during the summer before their senior year.

Share these four tips from college admissions officers on how to write great application essays:

1. **Start early.** More than 1,000 colleges use the Common Application. Encourage your teen to visit [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org) and check out the 2024-25 application essay prompts. There is even an app, so your teen can work on the go!
2. **Be yourself.** College essays are an effective way for colleges to get to know applicants. But it's important that essays show who teens really are, not who they think the college

would like them to be. Some parents are tempted to write essays for their teens. This is never a good idea. Admissions committees know what teens sound like—and that's who they want to hear from.

3. **Tell a story.** Every teen has a story to tell, and the college essay can be the place to tell it. Be creative. One student wrote a great essay about reading the morning announcements at school!
4. **Write. Edit. Rewrite. Repeat.** A solid essay takes time. It's not something that can be dashed off the night before the application is due. So encourage your teen to write a few drafts during the summer. That way, there will be a polished draft ready to show to a trusted teacher for feedback when school starts in the fall.

Source: A. Pannoni, "Top College Officials Share Notes on Great Application Essays," *US News and World Report*.

**Q:** I am so frustrated with how ungrateful my teenager acts. No matter what I do, it never seems to be enough. How can I get my teen to be more thankful and stop taking people and things for granted?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Behavioral psychologists say all children are born with feelings of gratitude. Unfortunately, teens can lose this natural inclination.

Gratitude strengthens relationships, reduces depression and lessens anxiety. It is also linked to academic achievement. Students who practice gratitude tend to be more engaged and motivated to learn—which can result in a deeper understanding of the material.

To foster a grateful attitude:

- **Model gratitude.** Let your teen see you writing thank-you notes or returning a favor. Thank your teen for things, too.
- **Prioritize appreciation.** Focus attention on the necessities your family has. Downplay family discussions of material possessions.
- **Sensitize your teen** to others who have less. Kids realize how fortunate they are when they see others with less.
- **Start a tradition** of sharing gratitude. Have everyone around the dinner table tell what they feel grateful for in the last week.
- **Discuss kind gestures.** Note how wonderful it was for someone to take the time to do or give something nice.
- **Separate privileges** and gifts from rights.
- **Offer praise** whenever your teen does show gratitude.
- **Don't ignore** times when your teen isn't thankful. Instead, remind your teen again why gratitude is important.

# It Matters: Summer Learning

## Try six strategies to encourage summer reading



Studies have long shown that when students read for pleasure they benefit academically. While some students may not

be assigned summer reading, they should still plan to spend some time reading.

To motivate your teen:

### 1. Focus on reading for pleasure.

The most important lesson your teen may learn over the summer is that there are things that are enjoyable to read. Whether it's pop fiction or news articles about a favorite athlete or even the Sunday comics, be sure your teen keeps reading.

### 2. Visit the library regularly.

Encourage your teen to browse through books and other reading material to see what stands out and looks interesting.

### 3. Connect on a different level.

Reading is one way to show you are aware of your teen's growing maturity. Look for an article on a more mature subject and discuss it together. Or, pass along a book you have enjoyed.

### 4. Listen to an audiobook in the car.

This may spark your teen's interest in listening to books. Suggest downloading an audiobook app so your teen can listen on the go.

### 5. Read some books written for high schoolers yourself. You may learn more about the things that are on your teen's mind. These books can also open the door to interesting conversations.

### 6. Set an example. Let your teen see you reading for pleasure often.

## Maintain a consistent schedule over the summer months

Summer is a time to relax—but not a time to relax important routines. Routines help teens develop responsibility and become self-disciplined. They also make it easier to adjust when school starts again.

Maintain family routines for:

- **Sleep.** When school is out, your teen's bedtime and rising time may be later than usual. Agree on a reasonable summer sleep schedule and stick with it.
- **Reading.** Schedule time for it. Keep your home stocked with reading material and encourage reading every day.
- **Meals.** Make it a priority to have at least one meal as a family each day. This is a chance to catch up and enjoy one another's company.
- **Screen time.** Extra free time should not mean more time



for screen media. Have your teen track and reduce the time spent passively watching screens.

- **Exercise.** Encourage your teen to spend at least one hour each day being physically active.

## Fill your teen's summer with engaging learning activities



Too many teens turn a summer off from school into a summer off from learning. It's OK to let your teenager spend a week or so de-stressing from the school year, but don't let this last all summer long.

Use the break to help your teen reinforce skills in:

- **History.** If you're going on a trip this summer, ask your teen to do research on the area. Your teen may be surprised to find out that a sleepy seaside town was once the hideout of a pirate captain.
- **Science.** Challenge your high schooler to plant a flower or vegetable garden. Your teen will learn about what plants need in order to grow—and might even be interested enough to look up the details on photosynthesis or how new varieties of plants are developed.
- **Writing.** Encourage your teen to keep a summer journal and to write in it daily. Having “nothing to write about” because days are “so boring” might encourage your teen to strike out on a new learning adventure.