

High School Parents®

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North Andover Public Schools

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Five strategies boost your teen's critical thinking skills

Developing a critical thinking mindset is one of the most essential skills for school success.

To help your teen expand her critical thinking skills, encourage her to:

1. **Explain situations**, examples and problems in detail. To describe an issue effectively, your teen will need to learn vocabulary and practice expressing herself clearly.
2. **Analyze information.** When your teen reads something online or in print, she shouldn't just take it at face value. She should find credible sources to help her determine the actual facts.
3. **See all sides of an issue.** Is your teen passionate about a particular issue? Encourage her to develop arguments defending opposing

viewpoints with equal dedication. This will help her look deeply at an issue and understand different perspectives.

4. **Participate in extracurricular activities.** Working on a school newspaper will teach your teen to conduct interviews and write articles based on what she learns. A drama club will expose her to great works of literature. A chess club will teach strategic decision-making. All of these skills enhance critical thinking abilities.
5. **Embrace diversity.** Throughout her life, your teen will interact with people who are different from her. Learning to appreciate differences will help your teen gain new insights about the world around her.

Success begins with a positive attitude



Having a positive attitude is important for success in all aspects of life. To nurture positivity, encourage your teen to:

- **Be hopeful.** On many days, some things will go well and others won't. Remind your teen not to dwell on what went wrong. Instead, help him focus on what went well.
- **Laugh.** Nothing is better than humor for getting rid of a negative attitude.
- **Move on.** Your teen didn't get picked for a certain team and the next chance to try out isn't until next year. After some disappointment, encourage him to put it behind him and try something else for the time being.
- **Seek opportunities.** If your teen wants to work with animals, he should look for a way to make it happen. Is there an animal shelter in your area that could use some help? Encourage your teen to call a few of them and find out!

Source: B.A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Disagreements can help your teen build communication skills



Sometimes, life with a teen can seem like a courtroom drama.

You say something and your teen argues back.

But arguments aren't necessarily bad.

According to child development researchers, it's not *whether* teens argue with parents (because nearly all do). It's the *way* that kids and parents disagree that's important.

This doesn't mean you should back down every time your teen disagrees. But you *should* listen to what she has to say. If she makes a valid point, acknowledge it. Perhaps you can come to a mutual decision.

Teens who listen to others and make their points respectfully have learned to communicate effectively. They are also better equipped to resist peer pressure.

One study found that these teens were 40 percent more likely to say *no* to a friend offering drugs or alcohol.

Communication skills are vital in school. Discussions are central to many high school classes. Your teen will get more out of them if she can make her point, listen to others and find a rational solution.

Source: J.P. Allen and others, "Predictors of Susceptibility to Peer Influence Regarding Substance Use in Adolescence," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."

—Epictetus

Show your teen how to create healthy smartphone habits



Experts agree that the use of digital devices can have a significant impact on students' academic performance, mental health and overall well-being.

To help your teen create healthy digital habits, encourage him to:

- **Have face-to-face conversations.** Does your teen text you from his bedroom? Does he text his friend who is sitting on the couch right next to him? If so, suggest he stop texting and start talking.
- **Try to find answers on his own.** It's easy to ask "Siri" for answers—but that won't teach your teen how to research information.
- **Turn off his device during lunch.** Teens benefit from having social interactions with their peers. So, recommend he make a pact with his friends: "The first person to pick up their phone has to throw everyone's lunch trash away."
- **Face awkward or boring situations** without turning to his phone. Challenge your teen to find other ways to pass the time.
- **Be aware of his mood.** Too much screen time can leave teens feeling lonely, anxious or depressed. Tell your teen that whenever he feels bad, he should talk to a friend or trusted adult in person.
- **Establish a cooling-off period.** If your teen sees a text or post that makes him mad, he should wait 24 hours before sending a response.

Source: L. Kolb, "6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones," International Society for Technology in Education.

Are you helping your teen handle academic issues?



For many teens, there is one class that is a real challenge. Perhaps the teacher isn't their favorite. Perhaps the subject is more complex. Whatever the issue, their grades begin to suffer.

If your teen is struggling in a class, do you know how to help her handle the problem? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about the class and asked her why she thinks she is struggling?
- ___ **2. Have you encouraged** your teen to spend time studying for this class every day? Minds are like muscles that get stronger with practice.
- ___ **3. Have you suggested** your teen talk with the teacher to develop a plan for improvement?
- ___ **4. Have you helped** your teen explore resources, such as tutoring?
- ___ **5. Do you celebrate** every sign of your teen's progress?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are taking positive steps to help your struggling student. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Taking notes while reading boosts your teen's retention



It can be challenging for some teens to remember what they have studied. One effective way for them to meet that challenge is to take notes while reading.

This six-question note-taking method helps students identify and remember the most important people, events and dates when studying history or reading literature.

Have your teen create six headings on a piece of paper: *Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?* As she reads an assignment, have her look for the answers to each of these questions and jot down relevant facts and information:

1. **Who?** Who was there? Who were the most important characters?
2. **What?** What were the most important things that happened?

3. **Where?** Where did this event take place? Why is that place significant? Would the event have been different if it had occurred elsewhere?

4. **When?** When did it happen? Were there any important reasons the event happened when it did (and not earlier or later)?

5. **Why?** What did this event happen? What were the causes? Why is it important to learn about this event?

6. **How?** How did it happen? How did it turn out?

If your teen has trouble finding answers to these questions when she's reading, suggest that she practice by reading an article from the newspaper. News stories aim to answer these six questions in the first few paragraphs.

Help your high schooler prepare for different testing formats



The tests your high schooler takes will likely be longer and more complex than those she had in middle school.

She may also face different formats—more essays and fewer multiple choice questions, for example.

Your teen needs to study for all kinds of tests, but certain types of practice can help her do better with different types of questions. Share these hints to help her prepare for:

- **Essay tests.** Your teen should create sample questions based on the main ideas in the material she is studying. Then she should practice writing answers to these questions in paragraph form. She

should write clear, complete sentences and include as much pertinent information as she can.

- **Short-answer tests.** For fill in the blank and other short-answer questions, your teen needs to know facts. Memory techniques, such as making a mental picture of what she is reading may help. Chunking, which is learning facts in groups instead of one at a time, is also useful.
- **Problem-solving.** Your teen will find these tests in math or science. To do well, she will need to know how to set up the problem and how to do the calculations. Daily practice, even when there is no assigned homework, is the key to mastering these types of tests.

Q: I didn't do well in math when I was in school. Now my son is taking a math class that I don't understand. How can I help him when he's struggling with his math homework?

Questions & Answers

A: You *can* help your son with his math homework—even if you don't know how to do it. Here's how:

- **Have a positive attitude.** Several studies show that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in math. So avoid saying things like, "I was never very good in math." Instead, say, "Wow, that looks challenging. But I know you will be able to figure it out!"
- **Ask your teen to explain** the math problem to you. Have him tell you, step by step, how he thinks he should solve it. This is one of the best ways for students to figure out a new math concept.
- **Suggest that your teen** write down the steps he has followed when doing his homework. While there may be only one right answer to a problem, there may be many ways to arrive at it. Then, he can show the teacher what he did. If his answer is wrong, the teacher will know where he went off track.
- **Point out times** during the day when you use math. Whether you use math on the job or to double a recipe, your teen will see that the subject is one he will always need.
- **Encourage your teen** to try hard and work his way through math challenges. His success will make it easier for him to face other challenges ahead.

It Matters: The Home-School Team

Help your teen learn to plan for homework



Students must learn to set priorities in order to meet all of their responsibilities at home and school. But this doesn't come naturally for many teens.

To help your teen develop habits that will help him stay on top of all he has to do, encourage him to:

- **Use a planner.** Teens have a lot on their minds. And when something gets forgotten, it's more likely to be an English reading assignment than the lyrics to a favorite song. So make sure your teen has—and uses—a planner. He should write down every assignment. Check regularly to see that he does.
- **Use digital devices as a backup.** Many teachers post assignments and deadlines online. Those are great in a pinch, but a planner will help your teen see the big picture: “I have a math test *and* an English paper, both due on Tuesday!”
- **Put after-school commitments** in the planner. That way, your teen can see which nights he's busiest. If a big project is due on Friday and he has a soccer game Thursday night, he'll see he must finish the project by Wednesday night.
- **Expect the unexpected** when working on projects. If he waits until the night before the paper is due to check out a book from the library, it may not be available. Planning ahead is a great habit to help your teen develop.

Source: D. Goldberg, *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond*, Simon & Schuster.

School counselors can assist teens with college applications

Maybe your teen has his heart set on attending a certain college. Or perhaps he has no idea of where he wants to go—or whether he could get in.

As high school students move through the process of applying for college, their school counselors become valuable allies.

School counselors are trained to help with:

- **Selecting schools.** Even if he wants to go to a particular college, it's a good idea for your teen to apply to several schools. His counselor can suggest ways to find schools that would be a good fit.
- **Writing a recommendation.** Many colleges ask counselors to write a description of the student. Your teen can make his counselor's job easier by preparing a short résumé which includes his accomplishments, interests and goals in and out of school.



- **Finding scholarship opportunities.** There are countless scholarships available for students. Counselors can help teens identify legitimate opportunities.
- **Staying on top of paperwork.** From applications to student aid, there's a lot to keep track of. Most teens need parents and counselors to support them in this task.

Talk to your teen about ways to show respect in school



Your teen may not excel in every class she takes, but if she treats her teachers with respect, she'll be a faculty favorite.

Teachers appreciate students who:

1. **Are polite.** They say *please* and *thank you*.
2. **Listen** when others are speaking.
3. **Say they're sorry** (and mean it) when they've made a mistake.
4. **Express their ideas** without putting other classmates down.

To encourage respectful behavior:

- **Be a good role model.** When you are talking with your teen, call teachers by their names—not “that math teacher.”
- **Meet your teen's teachers.** It's always easier to work together once you have spoken one-on-one.
- **Help your teen** put minor complaints in perspective. He may be upset with something a teacher said in class. Tell him, “Teaching is hard work. She was probably just tired.”