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Teach your teen how to take responsibility for academics

High school is a time to give teens more responsibility. Yet when it comes to academics, it can be hard for some adults to surrender control.

It's essential to be aware of what your teen is learning in school and to get involved when problems arise. However, it's also important to let your high school student take the lead.

Why? Because studies show that when families assume the majority of responsibility for their teen's school performance, academics can suffer. These teens are also more likely to become anxious and depressed.

To shift responsibility to your teen:

- **Expect your teen** to be in charge of assignments. Share time management strategies. Then, allow your teen some space to put them into action. Review progress once a day, rather than once every 15 minutes.
- **Encourage your teen** to solve school problems independently. Questions about a grade? Your teen should talk to the teacher. Failed a big test? Your teen should work with the teacher to create a plan for raising the grade. These are skills that lead to success in college and on the job, so let your teen learn what to say and do now.
- **Choose your words carefully.** "We" don't have a big paper due on Monday—your teen does. Always remember that it's your student's responsibility to fulfill commitments on time. If you hear yourself talking about *our* science project, it's time to take a step back.

Source: K. Reed and others, "Helicopter Parenting and Emerging Adult Self-Efficacy: Implications for Mental and Physical Health," *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, Springer US.

Help your teen create a positive digital footprint



Many teens don't realize that the choices they make online can affect their future.

Of course, students have the right to free speech. But courts have set limits on what students can say in school settings. And there's a big difference between what students are *allowed* to do and what they *should* do online. Colleges and employers look at students' social media activity.

To manage an online image, encourage your teen to:

- **Delete inappropriate posts.** While nothing ever completely goes away online, cleaning up social media accounts is a wise first step.
- **Practice polite and respectful** interactions online through comments, messages or posts.
- **Share content** that highlights achievements, positive experiences and community involvement.
- **Follow colleges** and business of interest. Your teen can comment on or share their posts.

Sources: E. Milovidov, "College-Bound Students: Create a Positive Digital Footprint," Family Online Safety Institute; National Coalition Against Censorship, "Watch What You Tweet: Schools, Censorship, and Social Media."

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Consistency is essential when it comes to enforcing the rules



High school students pay close attention to the way the adults in their lives treat them. This includes the way adults enforce discipline. Teenagers need consistent messages that show authority figures are serious and will follow through.

To promote consistent discipline, follow these guidelines:

- **Agree on rules** and consequences if you are parenting with another caregiver. Being on the same page can prevent your teen from taking advantage of either of you.
- **Discuss your rules** with relatives, neighbors or friends before your teen stays with them. For example, if you expect your teen to be home by a certain time on weekends, make it clear that the rule applies no matter where your teen is staying.
- **Support school rules** and expectations for students. Make sure you and your teen understand teachers' policies regarding tests, assignments and turning in late work. Expect your high schooler to follow the rules. If you have questions or concerns, contact the teacher.

"Loving a child doesn't mean giving in to all his whims; to love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult."

— Nadia Boulanger

Five strategies can help your teen study more effectively



Not all high school students know how to study. Those that don't may spend more time than they need to on their schoolwork. Or, they may get frustrated and stop studying completely.

Share these strategies to help study time pay off for your teen:

1. **Take class notes.** Writing down what the teacher emphasizes can help your teen see what the teacher thinks is important. Reviewing class notes each evening will also improve retention of the material.
2. **Break it up.** Research shows that studying material in short study sessions spaced out over time is more effective than one long study session.
3. **Study similar subjects at different** times. Putting new information into the brain is a like pouring concrete. Your teen has to give it time to "set up." So between a science lesson with a lot of formulas and a math lesson with a lot of formulas, your teen should study history or English—to allow the science lesson time to set.
4. **Avoid getting sidetracked.** If your teen's mind tends to wander during study time, suggest keeping a notepad nearby. That way your teen can jot down reminders or random thoughts to consider later and then get right back to studying.
5. **Eliminate distractions.** The TV, a phone and a growling stomach will all distract your teen. Ensure your teen turns off unneeded digital devices and takes care of hunger and thirst before sitting down to study.

Are you aware of what's happening in your teen's life?



Teens can be secretive people. But knowing what's going on in your teen's life supports school success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are keeping the lines of communication open with your teen:

____**1. Do you expect** your teen to inform you of social plans? And if those plans change, your teen knows to call you with an update.

____**2. Do you spend** some time each day with your teen—even if it's in the car, preparing dinner or watching a show? These are times when communication happens most naturally.

____**3. Do you share stories** about silly or memorable things your teen did as a little kid?

____**4. Do you plan** activities for you and your teen to do together—whether it's a household project or a special outing?

____**5. Are you available** to talk when your teen comes to you with a problem?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're doing a great job of creating ways for your teen to keep in touch. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Be alert for patterns when investigating substance abuse



When a high schooler is abusing alcohol and drugs, a pattern of signs often occurs. Unfortunately, families don't always see the signs for what they are—until they are faced with a serious problem.

Substance abuse is a life-or-death issue. Suspect substance abuse, or the risk of it, if you see several of the following signs:

- **Social issues.** Teens who feel like they have no friends, who are very down on themselves, or who start hanging around peers who behave recklessly, could be at risk.
- **Sudden academic problems.** There are many reasons for a significant drop in grades. But if it happens along with other signs of substance abuse, it could be part of a dangerous pattern.
- **Leaving evidence.** Things like empty beer cans, vape pens and rolling papers don't just appear. If you find them, it is likely your high schooler knows exactly how they got there. It is also likely that your teen has used them.
- **Not caring.** Teens involved in drugs or alcohol eventually start ignoring what was once important to them: concern for what family members think, for what non-using peers do, and for their own appearance. They may also start skipping classes or activities.
- **Unusual events** related to money. Drugs and alcohol cost money. Teens sometimes take money from their homes to support their behavior. On the other hand, a high school student who suddenly has more money than usual may be selling drugs.

Remind your teen of test-taking tips that work for all types of tests



Whether it's that all-important driver's test or a short quiz in math class, testing is a fact of life for today's high school students. While there are specific ways to approach each kind of test, there are some general strategies that will help your teen succeed on *any* test.

When taking a test, remind your teen to:

1. **Read the instructions carefully**—and then read them again. Your teen should know exactly what students are expected to do.
2. **Look for direction words** that say what to do, such as *compare, list, describe, define* and *summarize.*
3. **Read through all the questions** quickly before beginning the test. Your teen should think about how much time is available and decide how much time to spend on each question.
4. **Read each question carefully**. Your student should think about the answer to the question *before* reading provided choices.
5. **Skip a question** if unsure of the answer. Your teen should answer all the "easy" questions first and then come back to the others.
6. **Allow time to go back** and check answers. Did your student answer every question? Do the answers make sense? Are sentences complete?

Q: My teen was set on going to a particular college, but did not get in. To make matters worse, several of my teen's friends did get in. My teen has some other colleges to choose from, but is just too sad to focus right now. How can I support my teen?

Questions & Answers

A: The time when the college notifications arrive is one of the most stressful for high school seniors. Students who have worked hard don't always get into their top-choice school.

To help your teen cope:

- **Validate feelings.** Let your teen know that you understand the disappointment.
- **Share some facts.** More kids are applying to more colleges than ever before. That means that it's getting tougher for students to get into their first-choice school.
- **Offer perspective** and reassurance. There is no one perfect school for any student, and a person's worth is not defined by the college they attend. Your teen will have a chance to grow personally and academically at any college.
- **Seek support.** Suggest your teen get advice from counselors, mentors or other students who have faced similar situations.
- **Explore the alternatives** and focus on the schools where your teen was admitted. Can you visit them together? Most schools have events for admitted students and their families. Encourage your teen to attend with an open mind.
- **Discuss transfer options.** If your teen is still pining away for that first-choice college after a year or two, there may be an opportunity to transfer.

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It Matters: Mental Health

Friends can provide needed support for teens



During the high school years, friends take on a new importance. Some friends help teens become their best selves. They can encourage each other to do their best in school and out. They can offer support when times are tough.

To nurture positive friendships:

- **Ask your teen** to define the word *friend*. Discuss qualities that make someone a good friend—loyalty, supportiveness, reliability, etc. Do your teen's friends display those qualities? Does your teen?
- **Talk about online friends.** Can a social media friend fill the same need as an in-person friend? You may be surprised to learn that the answer can be *yes*. Researchers looked at a series of studies about teen friendships. They learned that, whether online or in person, good friends behaved in the same ways. They chatted about everyday life. They reached out in times of stress. As a result, the friendships had the same closeness and trust wherever the teens met.
- **Encourage your teen** to focus on quality not quantity. While many teens feel that having lots of friends is important, research shows that teens who have a few close friends do better over time. By age 25, they have a stronger sense of self-worth and are less likely to be depressed.

Sources: "Close friendships in high school predict improvements in mental health in young adulthood," Science Daily; S. Schwartz, "Teenagers' Friendships Online Provide Emotional Support, Study Finds," Education Week.

Kindness can make your teen happier and more successful

Research shows that people who are actively kind to others actually score higher on measures of happiness than people who don't go out of their way to be kind. And happier students tend to be more motivated in general—which ultimately helps them achieve academic success.



Encourage your teen to be:

- **Compassionate.** Kind people feel for others, even when they are not directly affected by a situation. Your teen can show compassion by reaching out to a student who seems upset, or by inviting a new student to connect on social media.
- **Grateful.** Kind people thank others. Did a counselor help your teen with college applications? Suggest writing the counselor a nice note.
- **Forgiving**. Kind people realize that holding grudges isn't effective. They are happier if they focus on solutions rather than blame.
- **Considerate.** Kind people take others' feelings, needs and wants into account. Showing up to class on time, sharing notes with a classmate who was absent, and contributing fairly to group projects are all ways your teen can show consideration.

Source: O. Curry and others, "Happy to Help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor," *Open Science Framework,* Center for Open Science.

Help your student set healthy social media boundaries



Social media helps teens stay connected with others, which is important for mental health. But social media can also have negative effects on mental health. Encourage your teen to:

- **Control content.** Suggest following people who are inspiring, like a favorite author. Explain that it's OK and healthy to unfollow people who make your teen feel sad or anxious.
- **Turn off notifications.** This strategy makes it less tempting to check social media constantly. Instead of reacting to every ping, your teen can set aside specific times to go online.
- **Put posts into perspective.** Social media posts can make people's lives look ideal. Remind your teen that no one's life is perfect. People are much more likely to take and share photos of good times than of not-so-good ones.
- **Walk away.** Have your teen take breaks from social media. It can be refreshing to go "off the grid" for an evening, a day or a weekend.

Source: A. Zsila and M. Reyes, "Pros & cons: impacts of social media on mental health," *BMC Psychology,* Springer.