



## Support your teen through end-of-school-year stress

Your teen has a math test tomorrow, a paper due next week, a new group project, and a summer job interview this weekend. As the school year winds down, this is the reality for many high school students. The increased pressure can significantly impact teens' ability to focus, learn effectively and perform at their best.

To support your high schooler during stressful times:

- **Listen carefully.** Sometimes, just giving your teen a chance to let off steam can be helpful. Don't try to "fix" problems. Just let your teen talk—and *really* listen.
- **Ask questions** to help your teen figure out ways to work through the problem. Would creating a

study schedule be helpful? Can the interview be rescheduled? Teens are more likely to embrace solutions when they choose them.

- **Encourage sleep.** Sleep is essential in order for students to perform at their best. It is also a mood stabilizer. A lack of sleep only heightens the effects of stress.
- **Suggest stress relievers.** Taking a few deep breaths before an exam or a job interview can make your teen feel more in control. A brief walk outside can help with focus. Eating a healthy snack supplies energy to keep going. But encourage your teen to avoid high-caffeine energy drinks, as too much caffeine can lead to agitation and insomnia.

## Four steps to improve your teen's recall



Most high schoolers have mastered the basics of reading. But remembering what they read?

That can be a tougher challenge.

To help your teen retain more from reading, share this four-step process:

1. **Visualize.** Albert Einstein once said, "If I can't picture it, I can't understand it." Encourage your teen to actively engage with the text. After reading each paragraph, have your teen try to summarize and picture the information presented.
2. **Predict.** Proficient readers ask themselves what they think will happen next. This is one way they stay focused on what they are reading.
3. **Ask questions**—before and after reading. What is the main idea? What is the difference between *mitosis* and *meiosis*? What were the causes of the Cold War era?
4. **Relate it.** New learning is most likely to "stick" if it relates to other things your teen already knows. Ask your student, "How is this similar to something else you've learned about?"

# A game plan can help your teen limit recreational screen use



Growing evidence suggests a link between excessive screen time and negative impacts on mental health—

including increased stress and anxiety.

Experts recommend that families help high schoolers limit their passive recreational screen use. Here are five strategies to try:

1. **Propose a challenge.** Have all family members spend one week writing down the amount of time they spend on recreational screen activities each day. How much can they reduce that time the following week?
2. **Create a technology curfew** that allows for at least 30 minutes of “unplugged” time to wind down before bedtime.
3. **Establish digital-free zones** and times. For example, the dinner table

should be a place where everyone leaves their screen devices behind.

4. **Brainstorm fun screen-free** activities with family members and create a list. Refer to it when you see your teen mindlessly scrolling through social media.
5. **Don’t use screen time** as a reward or punishment. It’ll make it seem even more important to your teen.

Source: Y. Zhao, “Brain structural co-development is associated with internalizing symptoms two years later in the ABCD cohort,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*.

**“Put down the phone, turn off the laptop, and do something—anything—that does not involve a screen.”**

—Jean Twenge,  
Psychology Professor

# Five strategies for improving communication with your teen



Communicating with teens can be challenging. What used to be easy to talk about can suddenly feel awkward and tense.

Families fear that one wrong question may shut down communication.

To keep lines of communication open with your high schooler:

1. **Keep questions brief.** Stay on top of what’s happening in school by asking open-ended questions: “What are you studying in science this week?”
2. **Be available.** Schedule time for one-on-one conversations with your teen, even if it’s just 15 minutes a day. This could be during a car ride, over dinner or while walking the dog.
3. **Be empathetic and understanding.** Even if your teen’s problems seem minor to you, they are *major* to your teen. If you belittle them, your teen will be less likely to open up in the future.
4. **Offer alternatives.** Encourage your teen to talk to another trusted adult if you aren’t available. Whether it’s a teacher, a coach, a relative or a friend’s parent, your teen needs to talk about school and life with someone you both trust.
5. **Focus on shared interests.** Find common ground by engaging in activities you both enjoy, such as watching a movie together, playing games or listening to music. When teens are engaged in an activity, conversation often flows.

# Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



High schoolers often face some sticky situations—from being offered alcohol to feeling pressured by a friend

to skip a class. Are you helping your teen make smart choices under pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ 1. **Do you talk about** the difficult situations your teen may face *before* they occur?

\_\_\_ 2. **Do you role-play** different ways to say *no*? “My mom would kill me!” is a favorite standby.

\_\_\_ 3. **Have you told** your teen you expect honesty—especially about serious issues?

\_\_\_ 4. **Do you communicate** your values to your teen? Remember: Values are *caught*, not *taught*.

\_\_\_ 5. **Do you create** everyday opportunities to talk with your teen? Casual conversations often pave the way for more serious talks.

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are having positive talks with your teen about tough issues. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Productive summers begin with boundaries and structure



The need for structure and learning doesn't end on the last day of school. But without a plan, your teen may end up just drifting through the summer—with nothing to show for it.

To help your high schooler plan for a productive summer:

- **Set boundaries.** You may decide to relax some of your family rules. For example, you might extend a curfew if your teen doesn't have to get up early for a job or an activity the next morning. But don't eliminate *all* expectations. Your teen should still contribute around the house and follow basic rules.
- **Encourage learning goals.** When teens let their brains

go on vacation all summer, their achievement tends to slip. So help your teen set some goals, such as learning how to play a musical instrument, starting a new hobby, or reading all the books in a series. Whatever the goal, help your teen make a plan to achieve it.

- **Focus on health.** Have nutritious snacks on hand and encourage your teen to drink plenty of water. Promote daily physical activity, too. Your teen could take a walk after dinner each evening, or sign up for a yoga class at a nearby community center.
- **Be flexible.** While productivity during the summer is important, it's also crucial to allow your teen time for daydreaming and relaxation.

# Brain research shows teens take risks when peers are watching



Brain researchers have discovered something interesting about the teenage brain. They've learned that teens may actually be wired to make bad decisions and take risks when their friends are watching them.

Researchers asked teens and adults to play a short driving video game. They were rewarded for finishing quickly, as long as they followed basic traffic rules. Half the time, the teens and adults played alone. The rest of the time, they were told that their peers were watching in another room. While they were playing, researchers monitored their brain activity.

The result? When teens thought peers were watching them, they experienced increased brain activity in certain regions of the brain.

At the same time, they took *many* more risks. They drove faster. They ran yellow lights. They were more likely to crash. In other words, just knowing others were watching affected their behavior. *The peer pressure was simply the presence of peers.*

On the other hand, when adults thought peers were watching, their brain activity and behavior did not change.

What does this mean for families of teens? Perhaps most importantly, never *assume* that your teen will make responsible choices in the company of friends. Before going out, be sure to review the rules—and help your teen think through the consequences of different actions.

*Source:* J. Chein and others, "Peers increase adolescent risk taking by enhancing activity in the brain's reward circuitry," *Developmental Science*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

**Q:** My kids fight constantly and I always get caught in the middle. This is making me dread their summer break from school. How can I teach them to treat each other respectfully and resolve their conflicts peacefully?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** You aren't alone! Even the friendliest of siblings have times when they don't get along—and many parents feel like they have to be referees.

Instead of getting in the middle of every squabble, teach your kids some basic strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully and respectfully. These strategies will also help them when they face conflicts at school.

Teach your kids to:

- **Talk about problems** *before* they become conflicts. When little things are ignored, they tend to grow into big disputes.
- **Use "I-messages."** Encourage your children to talk about their feelings, not the other person's mistakes. Instead of, "YOU always steal my clothes," try, "I feel angry when you take something without asking to borrow it first."
- **Avoid the "blame game."** If there's a problem, it probably doesn't matter whose fault it is. Help your kids spend their time fixing the problem, not placing the blame.
- **Listen.** Your children will never understand another person's point of view if they don't listen to what that person has to say.
- **Cooperate and compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they each have a problem. To solve it, they'll probably both have to make some changes.



# It Matters: Summer Learning

## Help your teen explore careers & develop skills



Summer is a great time to help your teen get a feel for different types of careers and strengthen work-related skills.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Spend a day “shadowing”** someone who holds a job of interest. If that’s not possible, help your teen arrange for an informational interview with a worker to learn more about what they do.
- **Look for internships.** Summer internships are a great way to build skills and to try out possible careers. Your teen should talk to the school counselor about how to find opportunities.
- **Think about volunteering** in a field of interest. For example, teens interested in politics could contact local leaders to learn about possible volunteer opportunities.
- **Go on field trips.** If your teen shows an interest in a particular school subject, suggest different places to visit in order to learn more. For example, a budding scientist would probably enjoy a trip to a science museum.
- **Find a summer job** that relates to career interests. If your teen is thinking about becoming a teacher, a job as a camp counselor or tutor will provide experience working with children.
- **Research extracurricular activities** for next year that will strengthen work-related skills and provide leadership opportunities, such as the yearbook committee, student government and the debate team.

## Summer reading provides countless benefits for teens

Students who read for pleasure during the summer months are more likely to keep on reading than those who don’t. And pleasure reading has a positive impact well beyond the last page of the book.

Getting caught up in a book:

- **Teaches persistence.** Most teens can’t finish a book in a single reading. That means they have to figure out ways to complete their other tasks so they can get back to reading.
- **Strengthens the imagination.** When teens get a chance to read about another world, or to “see” the world through someone else’s eyes, it helps them become more creative thinkers.
- **Engages the brain.** Reading improves critical thinking, problem-solving and memory. Regular reading over the summer helps teens maintain these essential cognitive skills.



Point to fun summer reading options by suggesting your teen:

- **Talk to friends.** What books have they enjoyed reading?
- **Look online.** There are many websites, including *Goodreads.com*, that will allow your teen to explore all genres of books.
- **Go to the library.** Your teen can just browse the shelves or ask the librarian for suggestions.

## Mentoring can be a rewarding summer activity for your teen



Few things are more important than providing children with positive role models. And teens can make

great ones.

Teens who act as mentors experience increased self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. They also gain valuable skills.

If you think your teen could be a positive role model, suggest mentoring. Your teen could:

- **Coach** a children’s sports team.
- **Contact an agency** such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Scouts or the YMCA.
- **Tutor a student.** Spread the word at local elementary schools.
- **Volunteer** at a day care center.
- **Start a playgroup** for children in the neighborhood to do crafts, play games or read.
- **Sign up to be a counselor** or a counselor-in-training at a day camp.