

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Gideon Elementary School

*still make the difference!*



## Help your teen deal with end-of-school-year stress

There is a test tomorrow and a paper due next week. Another teacher just assigned a huge group project and your teen also has a summer job interview this weekend.

The end of a school year is a time when many high school students feel overwhelmed by their workloads. And, since stressed students are rarely at their best, they sometimes perform below their capabilities.

To support your teenager during stressful times:

- **Be a good listener.** 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 come up with them.

- **Encourage sleep.** Sleep is essential in order for teens 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.

## Family time is still a priority for most teens



As teenagers grow older, most don't want to end relationships with their parents. They

just want those relationships to mature and grow. Spending quality time with family is still important to teens.

To maintain your connection:

- **Devote time each day** to your teen. Turn off digital devices and offer your undivided attention. Your teen may want to talk about something, share a new song with you or go for a short walk together. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you are completely engaged.
- **Show an interest** in your teen's life. Ask about school, friendships and extracurricular activities. Attend performances and games when families are invited.
- **Be welcoming.** Get to know your teen's friends. Offer to drive them to an activity. Make your home a place where they can feel comfortable hanging out. You will get to know the people important to your teen—and know they are all in a safe place.

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



It's no surprise that recreational screen time has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, studies show that excessive screen time is linked to greater stress and poorer mental health.

Experts urge parents to help teens limit their recreational screen time.

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 time 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:** J. Nagata, MD, MSc, “Screen Time Use Among US Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *JAMA Pediatrics*.

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

—Jean Twenge,  
Psychology Professor

## Productive summers begin with boundaries & 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:

- **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 hand-washing and 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.

## Are you instilling kindness in your high schooler?



When students are responsible and caring members of the school community, everyone benefits. Are you promoting kindness in your household? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- 1. Do you model** kindness by treating your teen and others with kindness and respect?
- 2. Do you teach** your teen to be kind on social media? It is never OK to post mean or hurtful comments online.
- 3. Do you promote** empathy by saying things like “Remember how you felt when you didn't get invited to that event?”
- 4. Do you offer** praise when you see your teen being kind to others?
- 5. Do you encourage** your teen to befriend a wide variety of students—even if others don't welcome them as easily?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are promoting kindness in your high schooler. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# 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 a parent of a teen? 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.

# Self-discipline & responsibility are linked to academic success



Discipline and responsibility are essential ingredients for academic success.

And there are many ways parents can help teens become more self-disciplined and responsible.

Have your teen:

- **Manage time** using a calendar. Seeing test and assignment due dates written down alongside dates of other activities will help your teen see when there is time for relaxation—and when it's time to buckle down and study.
- **Schedule** and keep track of appointments. This will prepare your teen to be responsible for managing time in the future.
- **Set a budget** and stick to it. Many teens have spending money from an allowance or a part-time job. A budget helps teens pay attention to their spending—and see that adding to savings can be more rewarding than making a purchase.
- **Plan a family activity.** Let your teen take charge and organize a picnic at a nearby park, a trip to a local museum or historic site or perhaps a visit to a relative.
- **Read news articles.** Learning about the issues facing world leaders helps teens see that their responsibilities (like walking the dog and taking out the trash) aren't the burdens they may have previously thought they were.

# 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.

## 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-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. They also gain valuable skills.

If you think your teen could be a good 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 child.** Spread the word at local elementary schools.
- **Volunteer** at a day care center.
- **Start a playgroup** for children to do crafts, play games or read.



- **Sign up to be a counselor** or a counselor in training at a day camp.

## 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 summer 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.

- **Prevents the “summer slide.”** Reading over the summer builds skills and helps teens avoid learning loss.

Help discover 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.