

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

February 2025  
Vol. 32, No. 6

Gideon Elementary School

*still make the difference!*



## Foster character traits that lead to academic success

Studies show that several aspects of character lead to school success: *zest, resilience, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism* and *curiosity*. Students who possess these traits often succeed more than students who are equally as intelligent but don't display them.

To inspire:

- **Zest**, show enthusiasm for what your teen is learning. "I didn't know zebra fish can regrow their fins. That's really interesting!"
- **Resilience**, encourage persistence in the face of tough tasks. "I'm proud of how you stuck with that assignment until you figured it out."
- **Self-control**, assign meaningful responsibilities. Getting used to completing tasks at home without being reminded will make it easier

for your teen to take responsibility for learning.

- **Social intelligence**, suggest that your teen consider other's feelings. "Why do you think your classmate reacted like that?"
- **Gratitude**, discourage comparisons with others. Instead, talk about the things your teen can feel grateful for.
- **Optimism**, help your teen see the bright side of events. Meeting curfew may mean missing out on a late night with friends, but your teen will be well-rested going into that big test.
- **Curiosity**, suggest exploring subject matter in more depth. Encourage your teen to go to the library or research information online.

Source: P. Tough, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

## Attendance should always be top priority



Attendance can make the difference between graduating from high school and dropping out.

Educators talk about the importance of attendance, but that message is most effective when it's reinforced at home.

To support your teen's regular attendance:

- **Discuss the importance** of showing up on time—whether it's for school, a job or an appointment. Set an example for your teen by striving to be on time yourself.
- **Don't make** staying home a treat. Consider making a "no phone" rule on sick days. Your teen will be less likely to fake an illness just to get out of going to school. Make it clear that sickness means following up with the doctor.
- **Set a goal** and offer your teen a reward for reaching it. Start with a short-term goal at first—like perfect school attendance for an entire month. Then, decide on a reward. Even something as simple as a special lunch together can be an effective motivator.

# Show your high schooler how to manage large school projects



Long-term projects often seem daunting to students. But with a bit of planning, your teen can conquer them.

To provide support:

- **Have your teen mark** the project's due date on the calendar. Then, suggest your teen work backwards, crossing out days when there won't be time to work on the project. How much time is left to complete the project?
- **Remain calm**—no matter how little time your teen has to do the work. Recommend breaking the project down into smaller chunks and setting deadlines for each part.
- **Offer assistance.** Of course you shouldn't do the project for your

teen. But you can support your teen by driving to the store to get supplies, proofreading a paper or listening to a presentation.

- **Provide motivation.** You'll be surprised at how helpful a simple "How's the project going?" or "I know you'll do a great job!" can be. Stick an inspiring quote on your teen's mirror.

**"Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it."**

—Lou Holtz

# Too much stress can decrease your teen's learning potential



High school students often have a lot on their plates—and on their minds. They can easily become overwhelmed, stressed and anxious. When their anxiety goes up, their grades can go down.

If your teen seems stressed out, suggest ways to relax. Your teen could:

- **Enjoy time with a friend.** Suggest they do something that makes them laugh, such as watching a favorite funny movie or making a silly dance video.
- **Participate in a hobby** (other than playing games online). Focusing on an enjoyable activity reduces stress.
- **Stretch.** Movement is linked to lower stress levels. Tell your teen to try a few minutes of slow, gentle stretches.
- **Breathe deeply.** A short session of slow, deep breathing can be calming when your teen feels overwhelmed. Practicing deep breathing for a brief time each day can lower overall stress levels.
- **Take a power nap.** Sleep is vital for stress reduction. A short 15- to 30-minute nap in the afternoon can give teens the boost they need to keep working.
- **Write in a journal.** Writing can help your teen clarify thoughts and feelings. It can also be an effective tool for solving problems.
- **Listen to favorite music.** Music can improve mood and reduce negative emotions.
- **Talk to a school counselor or therapist.** If stress is significantly impacting your teen's life, consider seeking professional help.

# Do you help your teen focus on one task at a time?



Teens are multitaskers. They send text messages while listening to music and watch funny videos while studying for

history. Studies show that teens have trouble shutting out distractions. So they may be doing several things at once—but doing none of them well.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your teen concentrate on the task at hand:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have your teen** turn off the TV, phone and other unneeded devices during study time?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you sometimes check** to see how many different things your teen is doing while studying?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you set an example** by focusing on one thing at a time?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help your teen** prioritize tasks and plan enough time to complete them?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage your teen** to read? Reading strengthens the brain's ability to focus.

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are encouraging concentration. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

**High School Parents**  
*still make the difference!*

Practical Ideas for Parents  
to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:  
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
Copyright © 2025, The Parent Institute,  
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an  
independent, private agency. Equal  
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Encourage your teenager to make time for pleasure reading



High school students typically spend more time on schoolwork than they did when they were in middle school. With the increased workload, reading for enjoyment may be pretty far down on their list of priorities.

However, research shows that teens who spend some of their free time reading benefit academically and socially. Offer motivation by explaining that reading can help your teen:

- **Travel.** Few people can afford to travel every place they'd like to go. But your teen can travel through a book—and gain knowledge that may help your teen get there in person someday.

- **Become an expert.** Reading is the best way for your teen to learn as much as possible about areas of interest.
- **Turn into a detective.** A cold winter day is a perfect time for your teen to grab a cup of hot chocolate and dive into a great mystery.
- **Laugh.** Appreciating the humor in books helps teens develop thinking skills. It can also improve your teen's sense of humor.
- **Meet like-minded people.** In books that feature teenage characters, your teen is likely to encounter people that think in similar ways and face similar issues.

Source: R. Martin, "Reading For Pleasure," Right for Education Foundation.

# Teach healthy relationship skills so your teen can focus on school



Many teens begin to date once they are in high school. Unfortunately, some teens don't really know what healthy relationships look like.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year. And only 33% of those teens tell anyone about the abuse. That's why it's vital for families to know the signs.

When teens are in unhealthy relationships, they often:

- **Do poorly in school** or miss school because they don't feel safe.
- **Doubt their self-worth**, feelings and decision-making ability.
- **Engage in unhealthy behaviors**, such as drug and alcohol use.

- **Become depressed** and anxious.
- **Think about suicide.** Talk with your high schooler about the importance of mutual respect. Explain that people who are in healthy relationships:
  - **Can talk openly** to each other. Communication is the key to a healthy relationship.
  - **Work together** to make decisions. They also support and balance each other.
  - **Divide their time** between their relationship and their friends and family. A relationship where two people never see anyone but each other isn't healthy.
  - **Feel free to be themselves.** People in healthy relationships accept each other's differences.

Source: "Teen Dating Violence," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Q:** My high schooler is very private and often keeps secrets. Last year, I wasn't aware of my teen's academic struggles until it was too late to address the issue. How can I encourage open communication and ensure my teen shares important information with me?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** When students get to high school, it's not always easy to find out what's going on in school. You are right to make the effort. Talking about school is important for you and your teen.

However, as you learned last year, teens don't always have the best judgment about what you need to know. To open up communication with your teen:

- **Emphasize that your teen** can talk to you about anything without fear of punishment.
- **Be a good listener.** When your teen does open up, give your full attention.
- **Show empathy.** Let your teen know that you understand how difficult it can be to talk about certain things.
- **Avoid judgment.** Refrain from judging your teen for feelings or actions.
- **Set an example.** Be open with your teen about your own experiences and challenges.
- **Respect privacy.** Understand that most teens need a bit of privacy and space.

Meanwhile, stay in touch with the school. Is there an online gradebook you can monitor? Contact your teen's teachers if you have concerns about academics. Your high schooler may never be a chatterbox, but you can find out what you need to know.



# It Matters: Reading Skills

## Reading speed affects students' comprehension



Students who are able to read quickly often have a better understanding of what they read. To improve

reading speed and comprehension, encourage your teen to:

- **Read silently.** Sometimes slow reading happens because the reader is whispering words aloud. Breaking this habit will allow your teen to read faster and focus more on meaning and less on decoding.
- **Read the material all the way through** before going back to reread. Students who read slowly may lack confidence. They are so sure they missed something that they go back and reread a paragraph several times before going on to the next. This slows reading and rarely improves understanding. Most of the time, your teen will get what's needed from the first reading.
- **Read clusters of words** instead of single words. Meaning is easier to grasp from groups of words than it is from individual words.
- **Match reading speed** to the level of difficulty of the text. When teens reads very challenging material, they should slow down. However, when they read light material, such as fiction and entertainment articles, they should do it as quickly as they can. The practice gained from reading quickly will eventually allow your teen to read everything more quickly.

Source: A. Gautam, "10 Simple Ways to Read Faster and Better," *Success Consciousness*.

## Help your teen gain a deeper understanding while reading

As students begin to read more complex material in school, they will need to really think about what they're reading. Encourage your high school student to focus on:

- **The author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform the reader? To entertain? To influence thinking?
- **The sequence of events.** What happened first in the narrative? What happened next? What was the result?
- **The main idea and details.** What is the author's point or theme? What elements does the author include that strengthens and supports this idea?
- **Figurative language.** "The ocean sang to me," doesn't mean the ocean really *sang*. It means that the ocean was appealing.



- **Relationships** between things that happened in the story or in history and the outcome.
- **The characters' feelings.** What decisions did they make as a result of those feelings?

## Challenging material helps teens build reading muscles



High school students benefit from reading challenging material. However, many popular books for teens are

written at a fifth-grade reading level—or lower.

A steady diet of that type of reading won't prepare high schoolers for the kind of analytical reading they'll have to do in college or in many workplaces.

According to experts, the ability to read complex texts is one of the most important predictors of student success in college. To motivate your

high schooler to tackle more challenging material:

- **Talk about building strength.** Making a muscle stronger involves lifting weights. Making reading muscles stronger involves reading harder content.
- **Make sure your student** completes the reading required for classes. Teachers often assign challenging works—and the only way to benefit from them is to actually read them.
- **Challenge your teen to read** a difficult book for pleasure. A librarian can offer suggestions.