

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Family and School Partnerships
Fairfax County Public Schools



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Time management skills help teens accomplish many goals

Your teen's ability to manage time affects school success in so many ways, from completing and turning in work on time to getting enough sleep. But this skill is challenging for many students, particularly as their schedules become more complex.

Help your student manage time effectively this year. Encourage your teen to:

- **Write down all responsibilities** and activities on a calendar. Listing them in one place will give your teen a better understanding of when and how much time is available.
- **Evaluate priorities.** Your teen should review the calendar often to see if there are activities that conflict or don't allow time for daily schoolwork and studying. School responsibilities should be your teen's top priority.
- **Plan a weekly schedule.** At the start of the week, your teen should transfer items from the calendar to a weekly planner, and schedule time to accomplish each task or activity.
- **Create daily to-do lists.** This habit helps teens avoid forgetting tasks. If no assignments are due, your teen should use study time to read, review or get started on an upcoming assignment.
- **Use tech tools.** Digital calendars can send reminders to help your teen stay on track. Suggest that your teen set up reminders a few days before a project is due, or five minutes before study time is scheduled to begin.



Establish positive attendance habits

The beginning of the school year is an ideal time to help your teen develop positive learning habits. And one of the most essential ones for doing well is attending school every day. Absent students miss key learning opportunities.

More than 25 percent of students were chronically absent in 2023 (missing more than 18 school days). Chronic absence not only lowers absent students' grades and prospects for graduation, it has negatively affected learning recovery generally.

To support a habit of attendance:

- **Keep track** of all absences.
- **Find out why** if your teen resists going to school. If your student feels unprepared, anxious or tired, help your teen address those issues instead of staying home.
- **Reach out** to school counselors for help with attendance obstacles.

Source: S. Mervosh and F. Paris, "Why School Absences Have 'Exploded' Almost Everywhere," *The New York Times*.

Suggest focus boosters

Studies show that sitting in the front of the classroom can improve students' performance—they stay more alert, take better notes and engage in more discussions.

No choice of seats? Your teen can always boost focus by reviewing notes before class, greeting the teacher, taking notes by hand and striving to participate in every class.

Source: P. Will and others, "The impact of classroom seating location and computer use on student academic performance," PLOS ONE, Public Library of Science.

Get off to a great start

Help make this a successful year for your teen by engaging with education from the beginning. Here are three things to do now:

1. **Open lines** of communication with teachers. This makes it easier to team up later if an issue arises.
2. **Help your teen** establish study routines at home. Ask every day about what your teen is learning.
3. **Plan to attend** school events for families, particularly those that involve your teen.



Insist on academic honesty

Surveys show that many teens don't see cheating as a serious violation, and more than half of them have done it. Research on cheating also shows that:

- **Students think** "everyone does it," and many fear losing out if they don't.
- **Technology** has made cheating easier.
- **Above-average** students are as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.

Make it clear to your teen that you expect honesty at home and in class. Explain that you value your teen's best effort more than a top grade earned by cheating.



Source: C. Spector, "What do AI chatbots really mean for students and cheating?" Stanford Graduate School of Education.



How can I motivate my high schooler to try to do better?

Q: My 10th grader talked a lot over the summer about doing better in English this year. But since the start of school, my teen hasn't done anything about it. What can I do to inspire action?

A: It's great that your teen has a goal. But wanting to do something isn't enough. It's figuring out *how* to reach their goals that helps motivate students.

Help your high schooler:

- **Get specific.** "Do better" is vague. Have your teen define a more specific goal and write it down. "I want to earn at least a B on my next writing assignment."
- **Create a plan.** What steps will your teen take to achieve the goal? "I will write a rough draft and ask my teacher if I can submit a it for feedback. Then I will revise it and proofread my final draft." Steps should be realistic—planning to write for four hours a night is useless if your teen won't really do it.
- **Anticipate obstacles.** "I have a lot of other homework and a volunteer job every Wednesday night."
- **List solutions.** "I will start the day I get the assignment, and schedule writing sessions around other commitments."
- **Post the plan.** Seeing it often will help your teen stick to it.



Are you helping your teen prioritize sleep?

Research shows that irregular sleep and late bedtimes affect students' ability to think and learn, make decisions and maintain physical and emotional health. Are you helping your teen get enough sleep? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your teen to stick to a consistent bedtime that allows at least eight hours of sleep a night?
- ___ **2. Do you have** your teen and block out time for sleep when planning a weekly schedule?
- ___ **3. Do you share** time management strategies so your teen doesn't have to stay up late to complete assignments?
- ___ **4. Do you set** a digital device curfew at least one hour before bedtime?
- ___ **5. Do you promote** daily exercise, which improves sleep?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen start each day well rested. For each no, try that idea.

"How can you get enough sleep, when your life is so packed out? The same way you do anything else: make it a priority."
—Matthew Kansy

Bolster character growth

As they approach adulthood, high school students are making choices and deciding what kind of people they will become. Support your teen's character development by setting and enforcing limits and sharing and modeling your values. In addition:

- **Ask your teen** to consider questions such as, "Can people trust and count on me?" "Am I respectful of others' time?"
- **Promote thinking ahead.** Have your teen list likely outcomes of different options before making a choice.

Reinforce school belonging

Students who feel they belong at school achieve more and are more likely to graduate. Recent research shows that support from family has a positive impact on a student's sense of connection to school. To foster a sense of belonging, encourage your teen to:

- **Participate** in clubs, sports and other school activities.
- **Invite** school friends to your home.



Source: A. Peng and others, "What Fosters School Connectedness? The Roles of Classroom Interactions and Parental Support," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Springer.

Strengthen screen control

Too much recreational screen use is linked to educational and emotional issues in students. But it takes more than willpower for teens to put their phones down. To make screen-use limits effective, share ways to make complying easier. Have your teen:

- **Turn off notifications.**
- **Put unneeded devices** in another room while doing schoolwork.
- **Charge devices** away from bedrooms.

Source: L. Langreo and A. Prothero, "Can SEL Help Students Curb Their Own Cellphone Use?" *EducationWeek*.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com