

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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Provide opportunities for your teen to practice self-discipline

Some key characteristics of responsible students can't be instilled simply by making rules. Self-discipline, for example, must come from within your teen. But the way your teen will develop this characteristic is with practice, which you can provide.

To encourage self-discipline, have your teen practice:

- **Managing time** using a calendar. Seeing test and assignment due dates alongside other commitments will help your teen decide when there is time to relax, and when it's time to buckle down and study. Have your teen schedule appointments (medical, tutoring, etc.) and use the calendar to track them.
- **Budgeting.** Many teens have spending money from an allowance or part-time job. Setting and sticking to a budget helps them pay attention to their spending—and understand that adding to savings can lead to bigger rewards than a small impulse purchase.
- **Event planning.** Set a budget and have your teen take charge of organizing a family activity such as a picnic, a trip to a local historic site or a visit to a relative. Plans should include elements such as food, transportation, route and activities. The responsibility to provide family fun can motivate your teen to follow through on details.



Mentoring lets teens show and grow

Few things are more important than providing children with positive role models. And teens can make great ones. Teens who act as mentors also gain a sense of accomplishment along with valuable skills.

Would your student make a good role model? Suggest ways to mentor younger kids. Your teen could:

- **Help coach** a youth sports team.
- **Get involved** with an existing program, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the Scouts, or the YMCA.
- **Tutor a child.** Suggest spreading word at local schools of your teen's expertise and availability.
- **Volunteer** at a day care center after school.
- **Start a summer playgroup** for neighborhood children to do crafts, play games or read.
- **Apply to be a counselor** or a counselor-in-training at a summer day camp.

Mentoring involves commitment and an ability to communicate—which also benefit teens in school.

Discuss wise media moves

Digital devices and social media aren't going away, so it's vital to provide perspective and help your teen manage online activities. Remind your teen that social media isn't always an accurate reflection of people's lives. And if your teen mentions regretting an angry text or social media post, ask, "What could you do to make amends? What could you do differently next time?"

Encourage summer reading

A daily habit of reading—even when school is out—builds more than reading skills. Getting caught up in a book:

- **Reinforces persistence.** Most teens can't finish a book in a single reading.
- **Strengthens creative thinking,** as your teen sees the world through someone else's eyes.
- **Helps prevent "summer slide,"** the learning loss that can happen over long school breaks when teens don't read.



Spark career investigation

Exploring careers can motivate teens in school as well as prepare them for adulthood. Encourage your teen to:

- **Ask to "shadow"** someone doing a job of interest for a day.
- **Look for a summer job** that relates to a career field of interest.
- **Learn about internships.** Your teen can ask a school counselor how to find opportunities.
- **Go on field trips.** Visit places together that relate to school subjects that interest your teen, such as a science museum, airport or art studio.





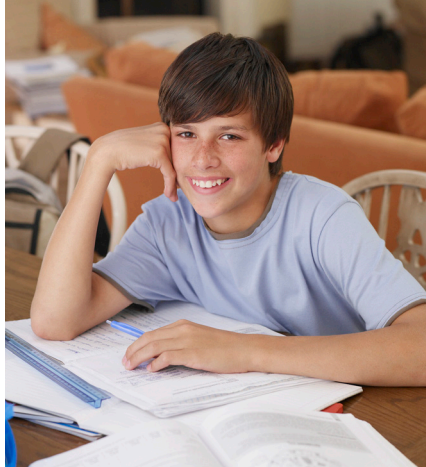
How much help should I be giving with schoolwork?

Q: My ninth grader always wants my help with school assignments. Should I still be doing this in high school?

A: There is an important difference between helping to do the work, and aiding your student's efforts to do it independently. In high school, your primary role is to support your teen by providing structure, an example and encouragement.

Here's how:

- **Maintain a regular time** each day for your teen to do assignments.
- **Discuss what your teen** is learning. Ask questions like, "Do you find anything about this topic surprising?" and "Have you done anything like this before?"
- **Show that learning** is a family priority. Discuss books and news items with your teen. Watch educational shows together. Mention things you are learning.
- **Share study strategies.** If your teen isn't sure how to approach a large project, for example, brainstorm the process together step by step.
- **Praise effort and progress.** When your teen tackles a challenge, express confidence: "I know that you can handle this."



Are you teaching your teen to be kind?

Students who treat others with consideration and kindness create a better environment for learning and thriving. Are you encouraging your teen to be a caring person? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you set** an example by treating your teen and others with kindness and respect?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** the reasons to be respectful on social media? Saying mean things about people is never OK.
- ___ **3. Do you instill** empathy by saying things like "Remember how you felt when that happened to you?"
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to be friends with all kinds of students, even if others may not be?

- ___ **5. Do you reward** your teen's kind behavior with praise?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your teen to be a caring member of the community. For each no, try that idea.

"Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end."

—Scott Adams

Ease end-of-the-year stress

Students who are stressed-out by mounting workloads and tight deadlines at the end of the year struggle to do their best. To ease the pressure your high schooler may be feeling:

- **Let your teen vent** to you. Don't try to "fix" problems. Just listen.
- **Prompt problem-solving** by asking questions. "Have you talked with your teacher?" "Have you created a schedule?"
- **Recommend stress relievers**, like taking a short walk to regain control and focus, and avoiding energy drinks, which can make teens feel more agitated.

Peer pressure can be silent

Why do teens who have been taught to behave safely and responsibly sometimes do the opposite? Studies show that teens take more "experience-seeking" risks when their friends are watching—even if the friends say nothing. Before your teen goes out with friends, review rules and help your teen think through the consequences of various actions.

Source: J. Joermann, Ph.D., "Why Adolescents Make Riskier Choices When With Their Peers," *Psychology Today*.

Set summer expectations

Without a plan for the summer, your teen may end up just drifting through with nothing to show for it. Discuss expectations together now. Expect your teen to:



- **Have goals.** Help your teen set a learning goal and plan how to achieve it.
- **Respect limits.** You may decide to relax a curfew, but your teen should still contribute around the house and follow basic rules.
- **Stay healthy.** Make it clear that a nutritious diet, plenty of daily exercise and enough sleep are important *all* year.

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