

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



April 2024

Title I Program

Elgin Public Schools

Have your teen try 'interleaving' when doing assignments

When it comes to doing homework, most high school students take it one subject at a time. But recent research shows that this is less effective for long-term learning than a technique called *interleaving*.

When interleaving, students mix several subjects up, doing a little of each before returning to the first. Instead of AAA-BBB-CCC, they might do ABC-ABC-ABC. To put interleaving to work, your teen could do the first seven or eight of 20 math problems, then move on to do some reading and some Spanish, and then go back to math.

After changing subjects, students have to work a little harder to remember what they know. (What is the Spanish word for *try* again?") That effort actually helps them recall the material in the long term.

It's important that students don't just use interleaving as an excuse to quit when something seems hard. Instead, they should keep returning to the subject until they feel a sense of accomplishment.

Remind your teen that even if this study technique seems to require more work, stronger recall power is worth it. As one teacher says, "It may feel worse now, but it will feel better when they take the test!"

Source: G.M. Donoghue and J.A.C. Hattie, "A Meta-Analysis of Ten Learning Techniques," *Frontiers in Education*, Frontiers Media S.A.



Foster reading comprehension skills

To really understand what they are reading, students must think about more than just the words on the page. They must also consider more abstract concepts. Encourage your high school student to spend time thinking about:


- **The author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform? To entertain? To influence thinking?
- **The sequence of events.** What happened first? What happened next? What was the result?
- **The main idea** and supporting details. What is the author's basic message? What elements does the author include in the writing that strengthen and support this message?
- **Figurative language.** "The ocean sang to me," doesn't mean the water had a voice. It means the author felt connected to it.
- **Relationships between** events or characters or plot points and how they affected the outcome.
- **The characters' feelings.** How did they affect their decisions?

Absent students lose out

No matter the kind of absence—excused, unexcused, partial day, etc.—the result is the same: lost learning time. Being absent for as few as two days a month means a student will miss 10 percent of an average school year. And this kind of chronic absence sets a pattern that is hard to recover from. Don't let your teen miss out. Insist on attendance in every class, every day.


Encourage volunteering

Teens want to make the world a better place and believe they can do it. A volunteer job can help your teen put that belief into action. To boost the benefits to your teen:

- **Point out the links** between schoolwork and volunteer work—skills, concepts, etc. 
- **Encourage your teen** to focus on activities in one area of strength and deepen experience in it. This will have more impact on a résumé later.

Nurture interest in learning

When teens are motivated by curiosity and an inner desire to learn, they are more likely to stick with tasks, keep learning and retain knowledge. To encourage this:

- **Offer opportunities** for your teen to display knowledge. Ask your teen to teach you skills learned in school. 
- **Ask what your teen hopes** to learn from projects and assignments.
- **Help your teen recognize** how good it feels to accomplish something. "You've done a lot of research for that paper. You are becoming a real expert!"

Source: P.Y. Oudeyer and others, "Intrinsic Motivation, Curiosity, and Learning: Theory and Applications in Educational Technologies," *Progress in Brain Research*, Elsevier.



How much sleep do teens really need to learn well?

Q: I can't get my 15-year-old to go to bed at night—or get out of it in the morning. This can't be good for learning in school. How can I help my teen get enough sleep?

A: Battles over sleep often escalate in adolescence. Teens stay up because they want to keep playing on their phones or watching shows, and they also must finish assignments. What's more, their internal clocks reset at this age. Teens don't tend to get sleep for many hours after the sun has set.

But if they don't get at least eight or nine hours of sleep every 24 hours, high school students get irritable. They are groggy in class. They zone out on tests and they muddle through extracurricular activities.

Have a talk with your teen. Point out that tired kids perform far below their potential. Then, work out solutions together. For a start, you can:

- **Set a digital curfew.** Devices should be turned off at least an hour before bedtime, and charged outside your teen's room at night.
- **Promote exercise.** Getting plenty of physical exercise every day will also make it easier for your teen to sleep at night.
- **Strike a weekend compromise.** If your teen goes to bed at 10 p.m. on weeknights to be up by 6 a.m., allow staying up and sleeping in an hour or so later on the weekends.



Is your teen prepared to handle school and a part-time job?

Part-time jobs can help teens develop traits like responsibility that pay off in school. But they can also overwhelm students' ability to focus on schoolwork. Is your teen ready to balance school and a job? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Are you confident** that your teen can think ahead and manage time responsibly?
2. **Have you set** a limit on the hours your teen can work each week? Keep it under 15.
3. **Have you explained** that if grades suffer, your teen will have to quit the job?
4. **Have you discussed** your teen's plans for managing earnings?
5. **Have you agreed** on how your teen will get to and from

work without disrupting your family?

How ready is your teen?

More yes answers mean you are preparing your teen to handle a job as well as school. For each no, try that idea.

"Balance is not something you find. It's something you create."

—Jana Kingsford

Enrich your teen's solo time

Teens these days tend to turn automatically to screens for entertainment when they are alone. But that's not healthy. Encourage solo activities like these that will make your teen feel worthwhile and productive:

- **Reading.**
- **Creative pursuits**—music making, arts and crafts, writing.
- **Exercise.** Suggest that your teen listen to an audiobook during a walk or a workout.
- **Cooking.** This practical, creative activity lets your teen use all five senses—and eat the creations!



School counselors can help

Does your teen understand that it is a sign of strength to ask for help when it's needed? This is true for a lot more than schoolwork. School counselors are highly-trained professionals who can help your teen:

- **Identify** and work through academic, social and behavior issues.
- **Find** support and assistance in a crisis.
- **Plan** for a bright future.

Make family meals work

If you have a table, you have a great place to connect with your teen over a meal. To make the most of mealtime:

- **Try to eat as a family** as often as possible.
- **Be flexible.** If breakfast together works better than dinner, go for it.
- **Include your teen** in conversations. Bring up topics your teen can contribute to without feeling put on the spot.
- **Save criticism** of your teen's behavior for other times when you are alone.

Source: S.G. Wallace, "The Art and Science of Family Dinner," *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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