

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Valentine High School



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Challenging texts help teens take reading skills to the next level

The ability to read complex texts is one of the most important predictors of student success in college. However, many popular books for teens are written at a much lower reading level.

It's fine for your teen to read popular books—especially if they build her enthusiasm for reading. But a steady diet of easy reading won't prepare her for college. It won't help her with the kind of reading she may have to do on the job. For that, she also needs to tackle more challenging material.

To help your teen rise to the challenge:

- **Talk about strength-training.** Making a muscle strong involves lifting weights. Making reading muscles stronger involves reading harder content.
- **Make sure she schedules** enough time to do the reading required for her classes. Teachers often assign complex texts. Reading them—not just skimming a study guide before class—is the only way to benefit from them.
- **Encourage her to read** a more difficult book for pleasure. She can ask a librarian to suggest a title that matches her interests.
- **Suggest that she listen while she reads.** Many classic works of literature are available on audiobooks. Listening as she reads along in a printed version can increase your teen's comfort with complex text.



Promote civil discussions

Everywhere today, heated disagreements are dividing people. But respectful disagreement is possible. When arguing, teach your teen to:

- **Use a pleasant tone.** Sarcasm and disgust won't win anyone over.
- **Look for common ground.**
- **Back up opinions with facts.**
- **Keep listening to all sides.**

Foster your teen's resilience

Learning isn't always easy—as this year proves. It requires persistence and hard work. And when setbacks happen, it requires resilience. To help your teen bounce back and overcome obstacles:



- **Encourage him to ask for help.**
- **Remind him of his strengths.** Talk about other hardships your teen has handled successfully.
- **Show that you believe in him.** It can give him the confidence to keep trying.
- **Suggest that he connect** with other students. Feeling connected to school friends strengthens resilience.



Join in the fight against cyberbullying

Online communication has become a lifeline for students. The downside is that more than half of teens report having experience with cyberbullying.

Recent research shows that teens who see their parents as loving and supportive are less likely to engage in cyberbullying. This is another important reason tell your teen often that you care how he's doing, and to ask how you can help.

To empower your teen to combat cyberbullying, have him:

- **Delete comments** posted on his social media posts that are mean or make fun of others.

- **Unfollow or block** users who repeatedly post harmful or negative things about others.
- **Report incidents** to a trusted adult.
- **Spread the word** among friends that he thinks bullying is wrong and he wants to stop it.

Source: L. Grunin and others, "The Relationship Between Youth Cyberbullying Behaviors and Their Perceptions of Parental Emotional Support," *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, niswc.com/cybully.

Ask questions to clarify understanding of science

Asking your teen to explain the science she's studying to you is a great way to help her find out whether she really understands it. Ask her questions like:

- **What concept** is involved in this unit?
- **What makes** this idea useful?
- **Can you show me** how it works?
- **Why do you think** your teachers want you to learn about it?





How can I get my teen to tell me what's going on?

Q: I want my teen to turn to me with questions and problems. But lately, I feel shut out—and I know he's dealing with adolescence and a challenging school year. What can I do?



A: It's common for teens to want to push parents away. But you are right that open communication will help you know what's going on in your teen's life so you can support him effectively. To encourage it:

- **Ask your teen** if he feels he can talk with you about important topics. If the answer is *no*, discuss how you might change that.
- **Set the stage** for serious conversations. You might say, "Can we talk about ____?" This gives your teen a chance to prepare or suggest a time when he'd be more comfortable.
- **Focus on listening.** Give your teen plenty of time to express his views. Ask open-ended-questions: "What helps when things aren't going well?"
- **Stay calm.** Getting angry or defensive could ruin the conversation. Take a deep breath and delay your response if necessary.
- **Problem-solve together.** Show your teen that talking to you can make his life easier. Be patient. It may take several conversations to deal with some issues.



Are you helping your teen concentrate?

Teens love to multitask while doing schoolwork. But studies show that while they may be *able* to do many things at once, they can't do them *well*. Are you helping your teen focus on the task at hand? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you have** a rule about turning off all devices during study time that your teen isn't using for schoolwork?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to prioritize tasks?
- ___ **3. Do you check** on your teen sometimes, to see how many different things she is doing while studying?
- ___ **4. Do you minimize** distractions in your home while your teen is studying?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your teen to read often? Reading

strengthens the brain's ability to focus.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen learn to concentrate on one task at a time. For each no, try that idea.

"Concentration is the secret of strength ... in all management of human affairs."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Encourage deeper thinking

High school teachers want students to think about how the material they are learning relates to other ideas. Your teen will also be asked to discuss her conclusions persuasively.



To help her practice this kind of thinking:

- **Challenge your teen** to form opinions and defend them.
- **Help her** see all sides of an issue.
- **Give her** the reasons for rules you set.
- **Talk with her** about the methods advertisers use to persuade people to buy.

Counselors can help with academics and much more

School counselors are trained to help teens and their families deal with difficult issues. Contact your teen's counselor if:

- **You are concerned** about your teen's behavior or mental health.
- **Your teen's grades** are suffering.
- **Your student or your family** is facing a crisis. Counselors can provide support and help you navigate the situation.

Put your teen in charge of getting schoolwork done

Sometimes, supporting your teen means taking a step back and giving him more control. That's how he'll learn to take responsibility for schoolwork and studying. To boost his chances of success:

- **Have your teen set** a regular time to do assignments and study.
- **Encourage him to use** an effective system for tracking assignments.
- **Remind him only once** that he has schoolwork to do. Then leave him to it.
- **Allow him to face** the consequences if he doesn't turn in complete work on time.

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