

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

St. Mary Parish High Schools
St. Mary Parish School Board



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Research has answers to common questions about studying

Study time is useful only if it helps your teen learn and recall information. Research on learning offers insight into *how*, *where*, and *when* students should study to maximize results. Discuss the answers to these questions with your teen:

• How should students study?

Experts say that mixing related topics up in a study session—foreign language vocabulary, verb forms and reading, for example—works better than studying one topic at a time. Variety seems to leave a deeper impression on the brain.



- **Where is the best place to study?** Studies show that studying the same material in different places may be the way to go. In one study, researchers gave college students a list of vocabulary words. Half of the students memorized the words while sitting in the same spot on each of two days. The other half studied in a different room each day. The second group remembered more of the vocabulary words.
- **When is the best time to study?** Sleep consolidates memory, and studies have found that students retain more when they study before getting a good night's sleep. Students also remember more if their studying is spaced out over several days. That leads to better results, without having to spend more total time studying.

Source: M.N. Imundo and others, "Where and how to learn: The interactive benefits of contextual variation, restudying, and retrieval practice for learning," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*; Brigham and Women's Hospital, "Want to remember new names? Sleep on it," *EurekAlert!*



Closeness is what counts in friendships

During the teen years, friends take on a new importance. But it's the quality, not the quantity, of friendships that matters.

Research shows that teens who have a few close friends do better over time. By age 25, they have a stronger sense of self-worth and are far less likely to be depressed than kids who seek popularity.

What about online friends? In one study, researchers found that close online friendships had the same benefits as real-life ones. That's because good friends behave in the same core ways wherever they meet.

They chat about everyday life. They reach out to each other in times of stress. They encourage each other, and try to resolve their conflicts.

Discuss the qualities your teen looks for in a close friend. Does your teen's own behavior reflect them?

Source: R.K. Narr and others, "Close Friendship Strength and Broader Peer Group Desirability as Differential Predictors of Adult Mental Health," *Child Development*; J.C. Yau and S.M. Reich, "Are the Qualities of Adolescents' Offline Friendships Present in Digital Interactions?" *Adolescent Research Review*.

Boost internal motivation

Motivation from within leads to lifelong learning. To foster it in your teen:

- **Help your teen set** learning goals.
- **Praise progress**, effort and knowledge more than grades.
- **Encourage self-evaluation.** How does your teen rate performance so far?
- **Express your belief** in your teen.

Join in a reading challenge

When students read for pleasure, they build skills without even realizing it. To promote pleasure reading, take a 15-minute challenge with your teen. Make a pact that you will *both* spend 15 minutes a day reading for fun. That adds up to almost two hours each week, or 90 hours a year—to strengthen skills your teen will need and use in school and beyond.



Focus timed essay writing

Writing an essay in a limited amount of time takes focused thinking. Share these tips with your teen:

1. **Think about the words** in the question. For example, *discuss* means give factual information about the topic. *Show* means support points with facts.
2. **Jot down ideas** on the topic and decide how to link them together.
3. **Write an introduction** that briefly explains what the essay will be about.
4. **Use each following paragraph** to answer a specific part of the question.
5. **Summarize the main argument** and the points that support it in a conclusion.





How can I enforce rules if 'no one else' does?

Q: According to my ninth grader, I am the "meanest mom alive." "Everyone else" has a later curfew—or none at all. "Everyone else" can go to friends' houses, whether or not parents are there. How can I uphold limits if "everyone else" lets their teen do more than I do?

A: Phrases that begin with "everyone" or "no one" are usually exaggerations. Teens always want their parents to think that other students don't have curfews or responsibilities—in hopes that their parents will change their minds about rules. But if you have thought carefully about the rules you set, you shouldn't change them just to please your teen. Instead:

- **Establish boundaries.** Say calmly, "Sorry. I'm not the parent of those other kids. I can't change what their parents do. But we still have a curfew."
- **Explain your reasons.** Tell your teen that in order to do well in school, students need to get enough sleep and focus on responsibilities. And you want your teen to be safe and cared for.
- **Verify information.** At a later time, check with the parents of your teen's friends. If you find out that everyone else really can stay out later than your teen, you may decide to relax your rule. But you will have made the change on your schedule, and not because your teen whined.



Are you helping your teen manage shyness?

Feeling shy isn't something your teen can control. But shy teens can learn to cope with those feelings. Are you helping your teen learn to handle shyness in school and social situations? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you express** your love for your teen often and in many ways?
- ___ **2. Do you suggest** that your teen choose activities of interest with like-minded students?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your teen find volunteer opportunities? Helping others boosts teens' self-confidence.
- ___ **4. Do you give** your teen practice navigating social interactions by role-playing together?
- ___ **5. Do you contact** teachers to discuss strategies if shyness

affects your teen's participation in class?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're helping your teen build social confidence. For each no, try that idea.

"Feelings are something you have, not something you are."

—Shannon L. Adler

Ask about learning

When you talk with your teen about school, make it clear that you are interested in what your student is learning, and not just what a report card will say. Ask about:

- **Experiences** that have changed your teen's way of thinking.
- **Small victories**—how did your teen solve that tricky math problem?
- **The book** your teen is currently reading.
- **A recent test**—does your teen think it was an effective way to measure what students in the class have learned?

Lead the way to respect

Seeing respectful behavior in action teaches teens more about it than any lecture. To show what fairness looks like, avoid passing judgment on your teen, a teacher or anyone else before hearing all sides. Offer support, not insults, if your teen makes a mistake. And every day, let your teen see you being honest, dependable and accountable.

Match reading strategies to the subject at hand

Different approaches can help students build comprehension in different subjects. Share these tips with your teen. If the subject is:

- **Math**, read the material at least twice (slow down the second time). Take time to work the sample problems.
- **History**, begin by reading headings, words in boldface, and questions at the end of the text. Then read the passage.
- **Science**, write new terms and their meanings on note cards and learn them. Use this knowledge to help figure out other new terms with similar parts.



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