

High School Parents[®]

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St Thomas Aquinas High School

still make the difference!



Studies challenge commonly held beliefs about studying

The beginning of a new school year is the perfect time for your teen to review and rethink past study habits. Research on effective learning strategies offers insight into *where*, *what* and *when* students should study.

Share these findings with your teen:

- **Where is the best place to study?** Most students have a favorite study spot. But several studies show that studying in the same place may not always be the best way to learn. Researchers gave college students a list of vocabulary words. Half 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.

- **What should students study?** Most students tend to concentrate on studying one thing at a time—vocabulary words today, verb forms tomorrow. However, it helps to mix things up in a single session. Variety seems to leave a deeper impression on the brain.
- **When is the best time to study?** Scientists believe learning is most effective between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. Students remember more if their studying is spaced out over several days.

Source: B. Carey, "Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits," *New York Times*.

Expectations are road maps toward success



Setting high expectations for your teen is a fundamental step in supporting school success.

Think of your expectations like a road map—without the map, there's no guarantee your teen will end up at the final destination (or even know what it is). With the map, your teen will be able to successfully find the way.

To ensure that your expectations are clear:

- **Talk about goals.** Help your teen make plans for the future and figure out how to make those plans a reality.
- **Discuss the link between *effort* and *outcome*.** Giving your best effort leads to longer term learning than earning an easy A.
- **Make time to talk** about school and schoolwork. This will help your teen know that you are interested in education.
- **Ask your teen to create** routines for schoolwork and chores. This shows your confidence in your teen's ability to get the "little things" done independently—and prepares your teen to handle bigger responsibilities in the future.

Talk to your teen about the negative effects of cheating



Most high school students don't view cheating as a serious offense. When they feel a lot of academic pressure, many see cheating as a way to lessen that pressure. As a result, everything from plagiarizing to copying a classmate's assignment to using a phone to look up answers during a test has become "regular" behavior.

To discourage cheating, let your teen know that:

- **Cheating is never OK**—even if other students are doing it. Explain that you'd rather have your teen work hard and earn a low grade than to score higher by cheating.
- **Cheating is dishonest.** Some teens don't realize that it is the same as lying and stealing. They're stealing

someone else's work and lying by saying it's theirs.

- **Cheating hurts.** While there may be some short-term benefits (getting out of some work), your teen won't learn the material, and if caught, could fail the class.
- **Cheating can become a habit.** When teens cheat and get away with it, they are often tempted to cheat again.

“Cheating in school is a form of self-deception. We go to school to learn. We cheat ourselves when we coast on the efforts and scholarship of someone else.”

—James E. Faust

Time management skills are vital to high school success



Many students struggle with time management. And the challenge gets even greater as teens advance through the grades and have more complicated assignments and schedules.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Create a master schedule.** Having all responsibilities and activities listed in one place gives teens a better understanding of how much time they have available.
- **Prioritize.** Your teen should review the calendar to see if there are any activities that conflict with responsibilities. Your teen needs to allow time for schoolwork and studying in the schedule every day. So if your students already has soccer practice three days a week, a part-time job may not be in the cards.
- **Create a weekly schedule.** At the start of the week, your teen should transfer items from the calendar to a weekly planner. Then your teen can block out times to accomplish each task.
- **Plan each day.** Help your teen get into the habit of making daily to-do lists that prioritize schoolwork. If there is no schoolwork, your teen should use the time to read, review or get started on an upcoming assignment.
- **Take advantage of technology.** Digital calendars are effective tools to help students manage their time and stay informed on the go. Suggest your teen set up reminders that will go off a few days before an assignment is due or a few minutes before study time is scheduled to begin.

Are you helping your teen get off to a great start?



“Begin with the end in mind,” advises author Stephen Covey. In other words, help your teen establish routines at the

start of the school year that will support year-end achievement.

Are you helping your teen build effective learning habits? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you encouraged** your teen to establish effective study times and places that are free from distractions?
- ___ **2. Have you suggested** your teen use tools such as calendars and to-do lists to keep track of assignments and other responsibilities?
- ___ **3. Do you make one-on-one time** with you part of your teen's schedule? Teens may say time with parents isn't important, but research shows it is.
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to read something for pleasure every day?
- ___ **5. Have you discussed** the rules you expect your teen to follow?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are preparing your teen for a productive year. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Address common attendance excuses from your teenager



Parents have heard them all—every excuse in the book for why their high school student should be allowed to stay home from school. Your teen may have even invented some new ones that weren't around back when you were trying to pull one over on your parents.

Here is a list of common excuses students use to get out of going to school—and ways to respond to them:

- **“I don't feel good.”** This excuse has been around for as long as school itself. Unless your teen can describe the symptoms exactly, has a fever, or meets other school-approved health reasons to say home, it's time for school.
- **“If I could just sleep for an extra hour, I'd be so much more productive.”** Respond that your teen can go to bed an hour earlier tonight.

- **“I have a project due at 2 p.m. that I haven't finished yet.”** Say that your teen isn't allowed to skip classes just to finish an assignment for another class. Then, help your teen make a plan to complete future projects ahead of schedule.
- **“I need to rest before the big game tonight.”** Remind your teen that school comes before sports and other extracurricular activities. Big events are no exception.
- **“Juniors aren't supposed to go to school today. I forgot to tell you.”** If this could be possible, call the school to make sure.

If your teen is constantly trying to stay home from school, it may be the sign of a larger problem. Speak to your teen's teachers or school counselor if you are worried about a reluctance to attend school.

Start the new school year with a focus on overall wellness



The pandemic pushed student stress to a historic high, and today's high schoolers are still dealing with the long-term effects.

That's why it is important to help teens take steps that will promote their overall well-being.

To help your teen reduce stress and have a successful school year:

- **Offer a sense of control.** Teens can manage their schoolwork and responsibilities independently. You can and should still be engaged—just resist the urge to micromanage or pester.
- **Promote physical health.** Ensure your teen gets enough sleep each night, eats healthy and allows time for physical activity every day.
- **Encourage your teen to connect** with teachers, classmates and friends—in person and online. Healthy relationships are essential for teens' mental health and growth.
- **Talk about self-care.** Suggest your teen set aside at least 20 minutes a day to just relax. Your teen could play with a pet, write in a journal or create art.
- **Recommend your teen** turn off digital devices for a few hours each day. Taking a break from notifications, texting and social media can help your teen focus on schoolwork and other activities.
- **Schedule an appointment** with a pediatrician if you become concerned about your teen's emotional or physical health.

Q: The school year has just started, and my high schooler is already falling asleep during English class. My teen says that the combination of a “boring” subject and the early hour makes it challenging to stay awake. How can I help?

Questions & Answers

A: Studies show that most teens are not, by nature, morning people. But they have to get up and start school anyway.

Sleeping during a class is a problem. Besides missing some of what the teacher has to say, it also damages the student-teacher relationship. Teachers are more willing to help students who pay attention and participate in class.

So work with your teen to find ways to stay alert during class. Here are a few ideas:

- **Enforce an earlier bedtime.** Your teen needs adequate sleep to stay awake and perform well in school. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends teens get eight to 10 hours of sleep per day.
- **Make sure your teen** knows that bedtime means no digital devices. Don't allow devices in the bedroom overnight for recharging—your teen will be too tempted to check them.
- **Have your teen** talk with the teacher and request a seat near the front of the room. The teacher may have additional ideas to help your teen stay engaged, such as allowing stretch or standing breaks.

The combination of more sleep and a little more focus should keep your teen awake during classes—even the early morning ones. And the teacher will appreciate your teen's honesty and willingness to improve.

It Matters: Motivation

Take an interest in what your teen is learning



You probably ask about your teen's progress in classes. You may ask how biology is going, or if math is getting

any easier. But many adults admit that what they really want to find out about is their teen's grades.

Grades are important, but so is the learning process. Make sure you show interest in the material and concepts your teen is learning—not just what the report card says.

Ask about:

- **Experiences** in class that have changed your teen's way of thinking. You may be able to share some of your own experiences that had a similar effect on you.
- **The book your teen is reading.** Does your student have questions about the plot? Does your teen relate to the main character? Does the book remind your teen of any personal experiences?
- **Accomplishments.** How did your teen handle the most difficult question on that science assignment? How did your teen feel after finishing that research paper?
- **Recent tests.** Does your teen think they were an effective way to measure comprehension? Will your teen do anything different to prepare for the next test?

Questions like these show that you care about what your high schooler is thinking. They also show you are monitoring your teen's development. Both of these reinforce the message that education is about more than just grades.

Effective praise is a powerful motivator for high schoolers

Praise can be a powerful motivator. That's especially true for teens with low self-esteem, or for students who struggle academically.

But as with so many other good things, praise can be overdone. Here are three ways to make it more effective:

1. **Tie praise to specific actions.** "You rewrote that essay taking into account the comments your teacher offered. It reads so much better now—and I am really proud that you kept at it."
2. **Offer praise in private.** A quiet word while the two of you are in the car will mean more to your teen than a public, "Isn't my kid great?" Don't worry—your teen will find a way to let others know what you've said!
3. **Focus attention** on your teen's own good feelings. The most important



part of praise is helping your teen recognize how it feels to do a good job. So make statements like, "How did it feel to turn in a paper you knew you had improved so much?"

Source: R. Lavoie, *The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child*, Touchstone Books.

Boost your teen's motivation to read with interesting material



Teenagers are more motivated to read if they have interesting books to choose from. Suggest your teen:

- **Ask around.** No book review is as powerful for a teen as the recommendation of a friend. A teacher might be able to suggest a book your teen would like, too.
- **Take current mood into account.** A sad novel may not hold interest if your student really feels like laughing. Talk about movies your teen has enjoyed. Then, suggest looking for books with a similar plot.
- **Check out the local library.** Your teen can browse books in person or search for books online. Encourage asking the librarian for book recommendations.
- **Look at lists.** Many book stores and literacy organizations compile lists of popular books for teens. Share a list with your teen.
- **Let one good thing lead to another.** A teen who enjoyed one book by one author should pick up something else by the same writer. One book on history may lead your teen to a book with a different point of view.