

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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Stay-alert strategies can help your teen maximize study effort

Your teen has a big test coming up. But putting in hours of study time won't help if she is fighting to stay awake the whole time. She's not alone—many high school students admit to falling asleep while studying.

In addition to helping your teen get between eight and 10 hours of sleep each night, encourage her to try these strategies for staying alert:

- **Avoid getting too comfortable.** If your teen is trying to study while snuggled up in a blanket on her bed, it will be too easy for her to doze off. Suggest that she focus on her posture. Sitting up straight or standing up while studying will help her stay awake.
- **Alternate tasks to keep things interesting.** If she feels herself getting drowsy while studying history, working a few math problems may revive her energy.
- **Drink plenty of water** (not energy drinks!) to stay hydrated. Eating a low-sugar, healthy snack can help keep her blood sugar stable.
- **Take periodic breaks.** One five- to 10-minute break after every hour of studying can help your teen's mind stay focused. During her break, she can splash her face with water or do some stretches to get her blood flowing.
- **Study with a friend** or in a study group. Discussing the material with others, in person or online, can help her stay engaged.



Add reading to winter break activities

Does your teen resist doing anything school-related during winter break? Keep vital skills sharp by incorporating reading into his time off. You can:

- **Travel with books.** If your family will be taking a trip over the break, make sure your teen packs some reading material. It will help beat the boredom of traveling—and maintain his reading habit.
- **Visit the library** with your teen in search of reading that is purely for pleasure. Ask the librarian to suggest popular titles.
- **Try new recipes together.** Your teen will not only have to read and follow the directions to create the dish, but he'll also have to practice his math skills when measuring ingredients.
- **Ask your teen to read aloud.** He could read a book to a younger sibling, or to an older relative who can't see that well. He could read to you while you do a chore.

Foster awareness of news

What does your teen know about current events? Perhaps not much. To spark his interest, ask his opinion. You might say, "What do you think about the governor's ideas about education?" He may say he doesn't know what they are. Then you can say, "Well, here's an article about it. I thought that since you're in school, you might have some thoughts."



Encourage healthy risks

Reducing the dangerous risks to your teen is a critical part of parenting. But some types of risk-taking can develop your teen's independence, self-confidence and abilities. Positive risks to take include:

- **School risks**, such as signing up for a rigorous course or trying out for a team.
- **Life risks**, such as trying to get to know new people or learning a new skill.
- **Community risks**, such as organizing a charity drive or applying for a job.

Reduce the effects of stress

Stressful events at home can lead to school attendance issues and make learning more difficult. You may not be able to remove some sources of your teen's stress. But you can share strategies to help her cope with it. Suggest that your teen:

- **Pause and reflect.** Taking the time to stop and think about the issue may help her see ways to address it.
- **Get moving.** Twenty to 30 minutes of exercise can help your teen relieve tension and clear her head.
- **Try journaling.** It may be easier for her to vent feelings in writing than out loud.



Source: M.A. Allison and others, "The Link Between Good Health and School Attendance," *Pediatrics*.



My teen barely speaks to me these days. What can I do?

Q: My 11th grader loves to talk with his friends. At home, he's either playing games online with them or texting or video chatting with them. But he won't talk to me! If I ask how school went, he says "fine." If I ask where he's going, he says, "out with friends." We were close last year—how can I recapture that?



A: Isolation during the pandemic may have brought you and your teen closer, but right now he is trying to separate from you. He's trying to figure out who he is. This is developmentally normal, just as it is for friends to take on a larger role in his life. But he is still your son and you have a right and responsibility to know what is going on. To improve communication:

- **Be patient.** Your teen needs some space to grow. Let him know he doesn't have to share *all* the details of his life, but he does have to answer basic questions.
- **Focus on safety.** If he tells you he's going out, say, "I need more information. Otherwise, you're not going anywhere." He should answer questions like: Where is he going? With whom? When will he be back?
- **Encourage conversation** by doing side-by-side activities together. Teens are more likely to talk if they don't also have to make eye contact. Invite your teen to work out, cook a meal, or watch TV with you.



Are you helping your senior finish strong?

It happens every year. With graduation in sight, some seniors fall into a "senior slump" and their effort and class attendance drop off. Are you ready to help your teen avoid senior slump? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you monitor** your teen's attendance so you can take action if it slips?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** the importance of keeping grades up? Colleges can (and do) take back admission offers.
- ___ **3. Do you look** for ways for your teen experience adult responsibilities—such as interning or volunteering?
- ___ **4. Do you work** with other parents to plan activities that will give your teens a reason to stay active in school?
- ___ **5. Do you try** to make the time you spend with your teen enjoyable for you both?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen stay focused on what matters. For each no, try that idea.

*"Remember no matter how fast you run, you can't be the winner if you don't finish."
—Israelmore Ayivor*

Writing things down helps teens stay on task

Having a written plan can motivate your teen to get to work faster and stay focused longer. To promote planning in writing, have your teen:

- **Make daily to-do lists.**
- **Schedule a week at a time.** Have him block out his classes, appointments and commitments on a calendar, then schedule homework and study time.
- **Use a monthly calendar** to plan for long-term projects. Giving each step its own due date will help him stay on track.

Nurture student growth

Supporting your teen in school goes beyond academics. Students thrive when families:

- 1. Love and connect.** Spend time with your teen, as a family and one-on-one.
- 2. Guide and limit.** Stand firm with your teen on rules about school, health and safety. Discuss ways to compromise on other issues, such as clothes and chores.
- 3. Model and advise.** Set a good example. Take care of yourself. Explain your thinking to your teen. Ask her to do the same.



Source: A.R. Simpson, Ph.D., *Raising Teens: A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action*, Harvard School of Public Health.

Volunteering improves lives

When teens volunteer in the community, they contribute to society—and to their own future. Your teen can gain work experience as he builds organizational and social skills and learns about issues facing people around him. To find volunteer opportunities, encourage your teen to contact his school counselor, local libraries, religious organizations and community service groups.

Source: "Why Youth Service," Youth Service America.

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