

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



May 2021

Success with big projects calls for management skills & motivation

Before the school year officially ends, it's likely your teen will be faced with one or more large, long-term projects. For many students, these assignments loom like intimidating obstacles between them and summer vacation.

Getting organized and working step by step will help your teen take these projects in stride. To support her:

- **Don't overreact**—no matter how little time there is before the project is due. This will only upset your teen.
- **Have your teen mark** the due date on a calendar. Then have her cross out any days when she won't be able to work on the assignment. Now she can see exactly how much time she has available (and when) to get it done.
- **Help her break** the work into small chunks. Encourage her to set deadlines for each chunk, working backward from the due date.
- **Offer backup.** You can't do the work for your teen, of course, but if she orders a book from the library, you can pick it up. You can read her paper or listen to her presentation and give constructive feedback.
- **Provide motivation.** A simple "How's the project going?" or "I know you'll do a great job," can help your teen maintain momentum. You could also stick a note that says "Almost there!" on her mirror.



Reading for fun has serious benefits

Your teen may have reading assignments over the summer. But don't let that be the only reading he does. Encourage him to read things of his own choosing. Students who read what they want are more likely to keep on reading.

Getting caught up in a book:

- **Encourages persistence.** Most teens can't finish a book in a single reading. That means they have to figure out ways to complete other tasks so they can keep reading.
- **Engages imagination.** When teens get a chance to read about another world or "see" their world through someone else's eyes, it

helps them become more creative thinkers.

- **Exercises skills.** Reading regularly over the summer helps your teen keep his literacy skills sharp.

Your teen can find books he might like by asking friends for suggestions, asking a librarian about popular books for teens, or looking on websites such as *Goodreads.com* for reviews by other teen readers.

Don't be a parent dropout!

As this challenging school year winds to a close, you and your teen may be tempted to start summer break early. But every day counts! Keep her focused by monitoring:

- **Attendance.** Your teen needs to be present in every class.
- **Assignments.** Don't let her procrastinate on projects or studying for exams.

What might be on the test?

Creating practice tests is a great way for teens to study. As your teen reviews the material, have him write questions that ask for:

- **A list.** "Give five reasons early settlers moved west."
- **Differences.** "How did life for settlers in the New England colonies differ from life in the southern colonies?"
- **Examples.** "What are three examples of irony in short stories we've read?"

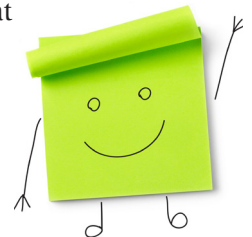
Then encourage him to write out his answers.



Feel the effect of gratitude

Research shows that students who feel grateful tend to feel more engaged with school and have better learning outcomes. To encourage this feeling, suggest that your teen write regularly in a gratitude journal. She could write about topics such as:

- **A relationship** that helped her grow.
- **An opportunity** she had recently.
- **Something great** that happened to her or a friend.
- **A personal** characteristic that she is glad to have.



Source: R.B. King and J.A.D. Datu, "Grateful students are motivated, engaged, and successful in school," *Journal of School Psychology*, Elsevier.



How can I help my teen get back on the right track?

Q: My son skipped a lot of classes this year. Now he's in danger of failing two classes, and he says he wants to give up and drop out. What can I do about this?

A: Your teen may think he's gotten too far behind to be able to catch up. But he's not the only student to do poorly or feel disconnected from school this year—and there is a way back. Don't wait. Take these steps now with your teen:



- **Talk with his teachers.** Ask what your teen can do to bring his grades up before the end of the year. If your teen struggles with the material, can the teacher recommend a tutor or other resources to help him catch up? Help your teen set realistic goals—it probably won't be possible to bring a D up to an A, but he can commit to turning in all his assignments.
- **Schedule a conference** with his counselor. Together, develop a plan of action that will enable your teen to graduate. Let your teen know that you believe he can turn this around, and that you will support his efforts.
- **Discuss why staying in school matters.** Have your teen research the types of jobs he can get without a diploma. How far will minimum wage take him when he wants to move out and have a life of his own?



Is your teen ready for a rewarding summer?

After a year of limited choices, this summer may bring teens more options for exploring interests and gaining skills. Are you helping your teen prepare to make the most of it? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you asked** your teen to verify that she will be passing all her classes? Otherwise, her summer may involve remedial coursework.
2. **Have you encouraged** your teen to consider taking a summer class?
3. **Have you discussed** summer job options, or businesses your teen might start herself?
4. **Have you asked** friends about opportunities for teens that may be available where they work?

5. **Have you talked** about causes or organizations your teen could volunteer to help?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen get ready for a productive summer. For each no, try that idea.

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."
—Seneca

Supply year-end stress relief

At this time of year, many teens are juggling competing priorities and feeling stressed out. Stressed teens often perform below their capabilities. To help your teen cope:

- **Listen.** Just letting your teen vent to you can be helpful. Don't try to "fix" his problems. Just let him talk.
- **Guide your teen** through problem-solving by asking questions. Has he created a master schedule? Consulted with his teachers? Let him decide what to do.
- **Suggest stress busters**, like taking a short walk to regain control and focus. He should also avoid energy drinks, which can make him feel more agitated.

Discuss summer boundaries

You may decide to relax some of your rules this summer. For example, you might extend your teen's curfew as conditions change and her schedule allows.

But don't excuse your teen from all expectations. Make it clear that she should still read every day, contribute around the house, get daily exercise and follow basic rules.



Prepare your teen for a self-disciplined future

Independent adulthood is the ultimate goal for high school students. Self-discipline is essential for achieving it. During the school year, teens learn this by managing their workloads in a timely way. Over the summer, help your teen practice by having him:

- **Schedule** and keep track of his own appointments.
- **Set and stick to** a budget.
- **Plan a family activity.** Put your teen in charge of organizing a picnic, a trip to a local historic site or a visit with relatives.

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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.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-103x