

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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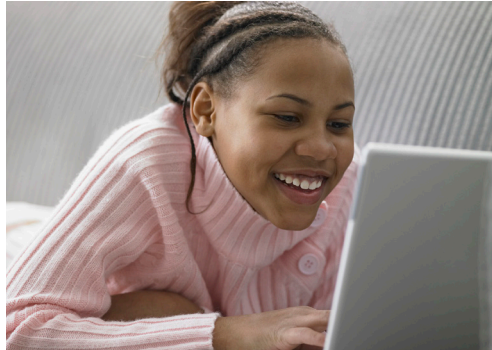
Benton County Schools
BOLLD Literacy Grant

Promote recreational writing to help your teen practice skills

Popular author Louis L'Amour had this advice for writers, "Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on." It's a fact that writing often is an important way for your teen to develop her skills and make her writing flow.

To spark her interest, suggest that your teen try writing:

- **A pass along story.** Have your teen write the opening paragraphs of a story, then pass it on to another family member. Everyone can have a turn or two to add text. Then your teen can write a dramatic conclusion.
- **A graduation speech.** What message would your teen like to give the students who come after her? What is the most important thing she's learned in school? What are the secrets to her success?
- **Family "mad libs."** Have your teen write a two paragraph story based on a family occurrence. Then she should replace 10 of the words with blank spaces. Under each space, she should write the missing word's part of speech (*noun, verb, adjective*, etc.) Then she can ask family members to supply replacement words to create a silly new tale.
- **A journal of the future.** What kind of life does your teen think she might be living in 10 years? Have her imagine her activities, friends and surroundings and record what she might think about them.



Support your teen through big changes

Teens' brains are still developing and changing. Research links this change with another rapidly changing situation—adolescent mood swings. Combine these with the alterations to school and life due to the pandemic, and your teen needs your support and understanding now more than ever.

To meet his changing needs:

- **Be patient.** Your teen is tackling challenges and attempting to expand his horizons. Listen respectfully as he discusses new interests and ideas. Choose your battles carefully.
- **Be nurturing.** Nurture his body and brain by helping him make healthy food, exercise and sleep

choices. Nurture his emotions by reminding him you love him and will always be there for him.

- **Be encouraging.** High school students still want—and need—parents' approval. Let your teen know you are proud of him and believe he can achieve.

Source: "Brain development: teenagers," Raising Children Network, nswc.com/bigchange.

Critical thinking puts the pieces together

Critical thinking is the skill that allows your teen to evaluate material, make connections and apply what she learns. To strengthen it, ask her to:



- **Analyze information.** When your teen reads something online, she shouldn't just assume it's true. Have her check the facts with credible sources.
- **Explain situations,** examples and problems. To do so, she'll need to learn vocabulary and express herself clearly.
- **Seek diverse views.** Understanding a variety of perspectives will help her gain insights and solve problems in the future.

Make discipline predictable

When it comes to maintaining discipline, predictability is a parent's best friend. At the same time you make a rule, establish a consequence for breaking it. Consequences don't have to be severe if your teen knows that you will enforce them every time.

Build smart digital habits

As teens rely on digital devices more than ever, it's important for them to adopt habits that keep the online world and the real world in balance. Encourage your teen to:

- **Talk to family members** face-to-face.
- **Try to find answers** herself before "asking Siri."
- **Set a cooling off** period. If a text or post makes her mad, have her wait 24 hours before responding.
- **Face boring situations** without automatically turning to her phone.



Source: L. Kolb, "6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones," International Society for Technology in Education, nswc.com/high_digitalhabits.



I'm not good at math. How can I help my teen learn it?

Q: My son is having a tough time with math. I didn't do well in high school math, and I don't remember much of it. Is there anything I can do to help?

A: This is a common situation. The good news is that there are several ways you can help your teen learn math—without having to understand it yourself.

To offer math support:

- **Take a positive attitude.** Research shows that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on children's achievement in the subject. So don't try to sympathize with your son by saying things like "I could never do math, either." Instead, tell him you know he is up to the challenge.
- **Encourage your teen** to set aside time every day to work on math, whether he has an assignment due or not.
- **Ask him to teach you** the steps to solving the kind of problems he's working on. This can help him figure out the concept in his own mind.
- **Tell him to show** all his work, even when he gets stuck. Then he can show it to the teacher, who will see where he got confused.
- **Point out times** when you use math in your life, such as budgeting, and talk about why you wish you had learned more of it.



Do you support learning from mistakes?

No one is perfect. So it's vital for students to learn how to handle mistakes and move forward. Are you helping your teen turn mistakes into learning opportunities? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you stay** calm when your teen makes a mistake?
- ___ **2. Do you teach** your teen to admit her mistakes and try to fix them when possible?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your teen consider ways she can avoid making the same error again?
- ___ **4. Do you set** an example by taking responsibility for your own mistakes and talking about lessons you have learned from them?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your teen to be kind to herself?

Perfectionists have a tendency to overreact to their errors.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are showing your teen how to respond to mistakes productively. For each no, try that idea.

"From their errors and mistakes the wise and good learn wisdom for the future."

—Plutarch

Start 2021 with specifics

Help your teen set learning resolutions he can stick to this year. The secret is making them specific actions, rather than vague ideas about "doing better." He might resolve to:

- **Review** class notes every night before bed. Sleep reinforces memory.
- **Ask** or answer at least one question in every class.
- **Read** for half an hour a day for pleasure.
- **Create** and follow a study schedule before every unit test.

Respectful disagreements build communication skills

According to research, the *way* that teens and parents disagree makes a difference. When your teen disagrees with you, hear her out. If she makes a valid point, acknowledge it. See if you can come to a mutual decision.

Learning to make her points persuasively and respectfully to you builds communication skills your teen can use in her classes. And it can equip her to resist peer pressure. In one study, teens with these skills were 40 percent more likely to say *no* to a friend offering drugs or alcohol.

Source: J. P. Allen and others, "Predictors of Susceptibility to Peer Influence Regarding Substance Use in Adolescence," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Help your teen feel capable

Students with confidence in their abilities often achieve more because they believe they *can* reach their goals. To support this perception:



- **Ask your teen to help** a sibling or friend with something.
- **Allow your teen** to make as many decisions for himself as possible.
- **Recognize progress.** Point out that your teen's studying is paying off.

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