

# What to Do If Your Teen is Having A Problem in School



It's not uncommon for a teen to have a problem in school. Perhaps it's a subject or a skill he can't seem to master. Maybe it's a behavior issue, homework, or trouble getting along with a teacher or with other students.

Luckily, most difficulties are easily resolved when students, parents and schools work together. Perhaps the most important thing is to act quickly, before the problem gets out of hand. Here's help if you ever wonder, "How am I ever going to resolve this problem?"

## QuickTips®

## WHAT CAN YOU DO IF:



### Your teen is having problems with homework?

First, talk with your teen. Ask her to tell or show you what she doesn't understand. Have her read and explain the directions to you. If it's a math problem, have her explain the sample problems in the textbook to you. If it's a comprehension problem, for example with a history text, have her review the boldfaced words in the text. Have her read one section of the text and tell you in her own words what she read. Ask if your teen can call or email the teacher when she has a problem with a homework assignment.

### Your teen is not behaving in the classroom?

Talk with your teen first. Also, talk with her teachers and, perhaps, your school principal. They want to help. Their insights about what is happening, combined with what you know about the problem, will be useful in planning what to do. Action is usually needed both at school and at home.

### Your teen doesn't get along with one of her teachers?

Acknowledge your child's feelings. You might say, "It's okay not to like every teacher. But it's important to work with people you don't like."



Find out as much as you can about why your child doesn't like her teacher. Listen carefully and remember there are two sides to every problem. Don't necessarily believe everything your child says.

Ask for a meeting with the teacher. Be open and honest. Often, you can solve the problem just by talking about it. Be supportive of your child—but let the teacher know you understand that teaching is a difficult job. If the meeting with the teacher doesn't help resolve the issue, ask to talk with the principal and the teacher together.

### Your teen is not getting along with another student?

Talk with your teen first. Ask your teen to tell you about some specific times when she had a problem with the student. See if you can find a way for her to resolve the problem on her own. If she continues to have serious problems with the student, contact her guidance counselor. Counselors are trained to help students with social as well as academic problems.

## Use a step-by-step approach

Your teen may face a wide variety of problems at school. Following three simple steps may help solve most of them:



1. **Talk calmly with your teen.** Ask questions and listen quietly. Often the solution will become clear just by talking about it.
2. **Have your teen try to work out the problem on his own.** Have him talk with those involved. Remind him that the goal isn't to assign blame—it's to find a solution. If he isn't successful in resolving the problem on his own, get involved. Make an appointment with your teen's teacher or counselor. In some situations, you may want your teen to attend the meeting.
3. **Talk with your school principal.** If you, your child *and* the teachers cannot find a good solution, meet with your principal. The principal has lots of experience with student problems and can add yet another perspective. A calm, courteous discussion is almost sure to produce a solution that works for everyone. If not, the principal can advise you about next steps you can consider.



## When is it time to contact the teacher?

Sometimes parents ask if they should “bother” the teacher with a problem. They wonder, “Should I just keep quiet and hope for the best?”

Teachers say they want to know what's going on in their students' lives—and the earlier the better. Chances are if you've noticed a problem, your teen's teachers have probably seen it, too.

With any problem, it's usually best to start by contacting the teacher involved. You should definitely contact the teacher when:

- **Your teen's grades drop.** Whether it's in one subject, or in all of them, a dramatic drop (more than one letter grade) indicates there's trouble.
- **You suspect your teen** may be telling you things that aren't true. When, day after day, your child says there's no homework—but other parents say their kids have assignments—you want to get the real story.
- **There's been a change** in your family. A new marriage or a divorce, a serious illness, a move or the birth of a child can all affect school performance.



## Remember, everyone is trying to help your teen.

You want the very best for your teen. Your school staff does, too. Sometimes, reasonable people who are all working toward the same goal will disagree. But clear, honest communication and a commitment to working together will almost always solve the problem.

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