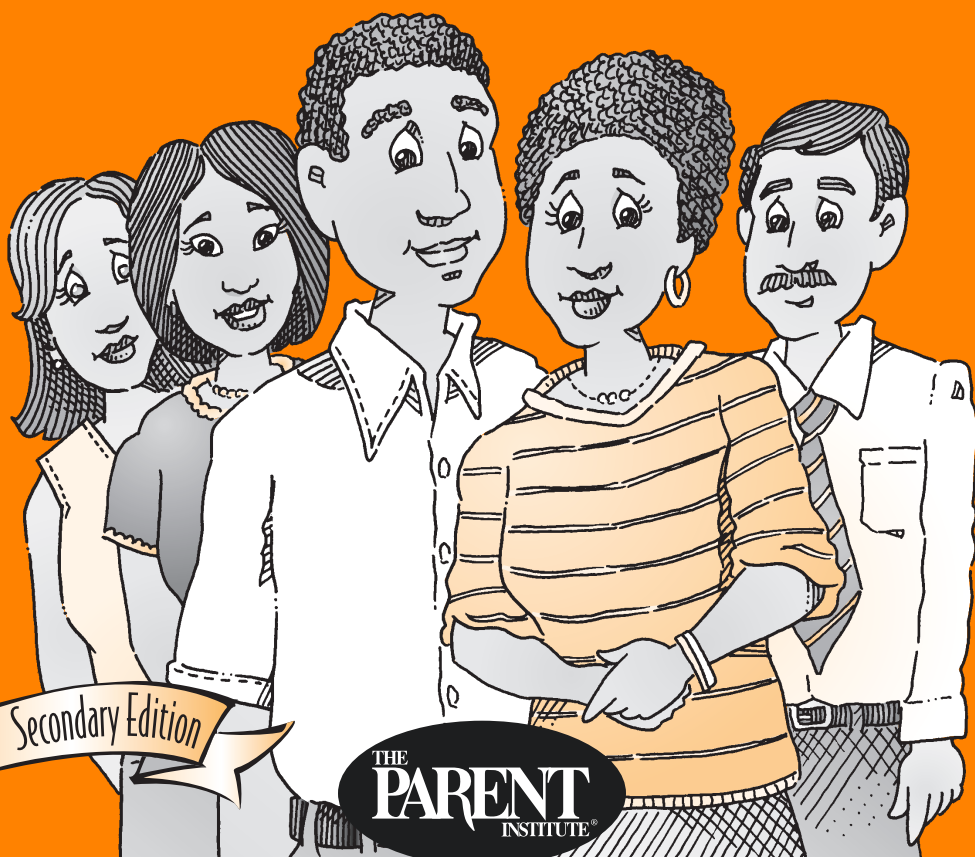
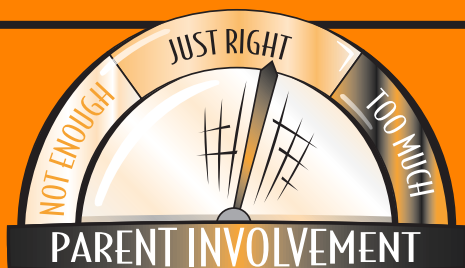


FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE



A Guide for Parents to Build Student Success



There are many ways to be involved with your teen's life. But for long-term success, probably nothing is as important as being involved with your teen's education.

Still, it can be hard sometimes to find the right balance. When does positive parent involvement become too much involvement? When does wanting to help your teen develop independence turn into too little involvement?

The things you did in elementary school probably won't work when your child reaches high school. And the level of involvement that was just right for one child may not work for another.

There is no single best way to find the right balance. But the tips in this booklet should help you and your teen find a level of involvement that will help your teen achieve school success.



Note: Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We alternate using "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.

Most parents want to do all they can to help their children grow into responsible and independent adults. But sometimes, in their efforts to help their kids, they get a little too involved—or not involved enough. How involved are *you*?

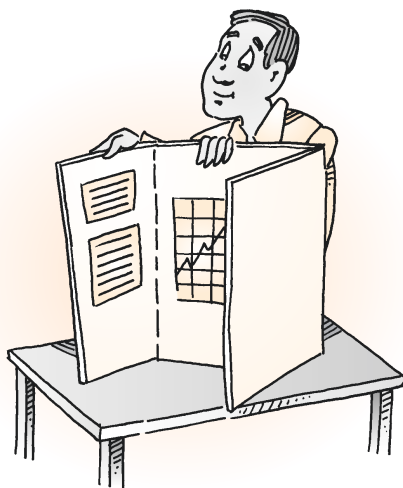
Find out by taking this quiz.

Check the answer that best describes how you would respond.

1. Your daughter just told you she has a big science fair project due—tomorrow.

Your first response is to:

- ☐ **a. Start the online research** and then write the report. Ask your spouse to put together the display. Your daughter can ask her sister to color in the poster.
- ☐ **b. Leave for your evening meeting.** Maybe she can skip school to get the project done.
- ☐ **c. Offer to proofread the report** once she has written a draft. Provide a snack while she works on the project.



2. The school calls to tell you your teen has been suspended. It wasn't a big fight, but he definitely punched another student.

Your first response is to:

- ☐ **a. Call your lawyer.** Your son certainly would never do anything like that.
- ☐ **b. Do nothing.** Boys will be boys.
- ☐ **c. Talk with your son** about what he did. Help him face the consequences, starting with apologizing to the other student and to the principal. Remind him that you're very disappointed with his behavior, but you still love him.

3. Your daughter is in the school musical and she was at rehearsal until late last night. She wants to miss first period today so she can sleep in. The teacher has planned a big lab project for that class.

Your response is to:

- ☐ a. **Let her sleep in.** She's tired from rehearsal. The teacher probably won't mind setting up the lab again. After all, your daughter *is* the star of the show.
- ☐ b. **Let her do what she wants.** Missing one class won't matter.
- ☐ c. **Help her think** about ways to meet both sets of responsibilities. Since she has several hours after school before rehearsal, offer to pick her up so she can take a nap and then do her homework.

4. Your son's teacher says he plagiarized a big research paper. She gave your teen a grade of F.

Your response is to:

- ☐ a. **Call the principal,** the superintendent and the school board. Your son can't get an F. How will he get into a good college?
- ☐ b. **Shrug it off.** He's just a teenager. The school will have to fix this problem.
- ☐ c. **Discuss the seriousness** of plagiarizing with your son. Point out that colleges, and many high schools, expel students for it. Together, brainstorm about ways your teen might start to regain the teacher's trust. Perhaps he can still pull his grade up before the end of the year.





5. The coach isn't giving your teen much playing time.

Your response is to:

- ☐ **a. Call the principal,** then the athletic director. Insist that your teen get more playing time so she can win a scholarship.
- ☐ **b. Let her quit the team** if she wants. The coach never liked her anyway.
- ☐ **c. Talk with your child** about the importance of teamwork and respecting the coach. Suggest she talk to the coach about how she can improve her skills.

6. College applications are due soon. So far, your teen hasn't lifted a finger.

Your response is to:

- ☐ **a. Start writing the essay.** Then call and tell the counselor what to write in the recommendation letter.
- ☐ **b. Let him handle it.** If he doesn't get in to a college, he can always get a job and apply later.
- ☐ **c. Talk to his counselor.** Can the two of you work out a way to motivate your teen to fill out the applications?

7. Your child is struggling in math.

Your response is to:

- ☐ **a. Insist on observing every math teacher.** Then demand that your teen be placed in a “better” class.
- ☐ **b. Ignore the problem.** It’s his teacher’s job to help him.
- ☐ **c. Ask for a meeting with your son and his teacher.** Together, talk about his achievement in the class. Is he doing his best? What else could he do? Is he placed in the right level of class? Together, come up with a plan to help your son.



Record your scores here:

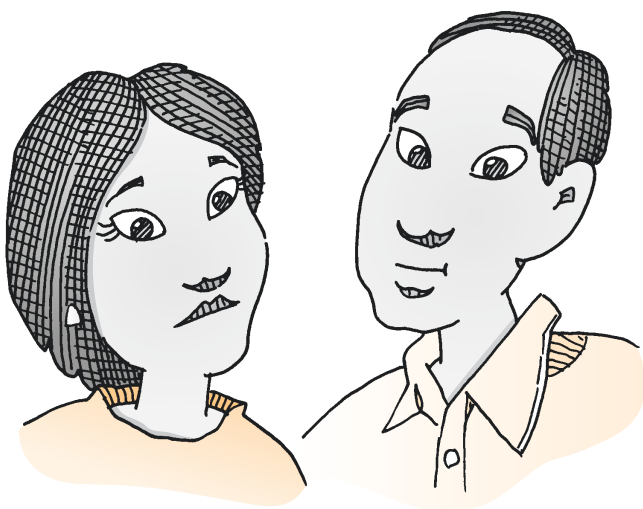
a: _____ b: _____ c: _____

If most of your answers are a's, that's a sign that you may be too involved. For tips on ways you can let your teen take more responsibility for her own learning, turn to pages 6 and 7 in this booklet.

If most of your answers are b's, that's a sign that you could increase your level of involvement with your child's education. Studies show that parent involvement for older students is just as important as it was in elementary school. For ways to step up your involvement, turn to pages 8 and 9 in this booklet.

If most of your answers are C's, you're working hard to strike the right balance. There are still things you may want to do to help your teen be more successful in school. For some suggestions, turn to pages 10 and 11 of this booklet.

So what's the right level of involvement for *you*? Keep reading for tips on how you can find the right balance in fostering your student's school success ...



What can you do if you're too involved?

Parents want the best for their kids—and being involved with their lives is a good thing. Still, it's important that involvement doesn't turn into too much of a good thing.

Some parents think if they don't step in, their child will fail. In fact, one study by researchers at the University of Illinois found that just the opposite was true. Kids who were struggling in school actually did better when their parents backed off a bit.

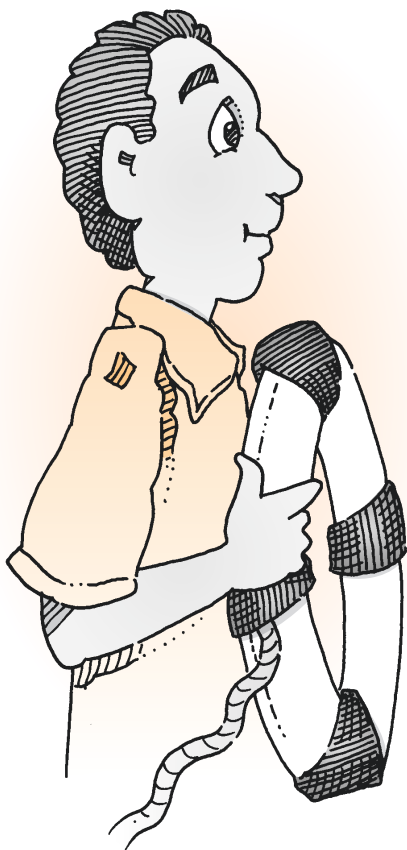
Ready to try taking a few steps back? Here are some tips:

- **Don't rescue your teen.**

If the paper he's turning in tomorrow isn't very good, don't rewrite it. Let him turn it in and learn what the teacher expects. One bad grade in high school is not going to keep him out of college.

- **Be a good sport.** When your child is in sports, let the coach do the coaching. Your job should be to cheer on the team—the whole team—and not to correct the coach or referee.

- **Remember that being on your teen's side** doesn't always mean *taking* his side. You don't have to defend everything your teen does. In fact, helping him learn from his mistakes may be the most valuable lesson you ever teach.



- **Avoid unrealistic expectations.** If it's more important to you than to your teen, that's a sign that you're too involved. She may be happy singing in the chorus instead of playing the lead. She may want to go to State U instead of the Ivy League. Parents' unrealistic expectations are a major cause of teen stress.



- **Help with college choices,** but remember your teen is the one who will live with this decision. Today, some parents spend more time on college applications than their teen does. Help your teen set realistic goals. Talk honestly about your budget and your child's academic qualifications. Offer help when needed, but let your teen be in charge.
- **Keep in touch with your teen's teachers,** but don't always expect the teachers to email or call you back immediately. Teachers often receive more than 25 emails a day from parents. Allow a day or two to get a response. High school teachers are not only busy teaching, but many are involved with coaching or other after-school activities, as well.

How can you become more involved?

Letting children learn to stand on their own feet is a good idea. But more than 20 years of research shows that appropriate parent involvement is the single most important way parents can help their kids succeed in school.

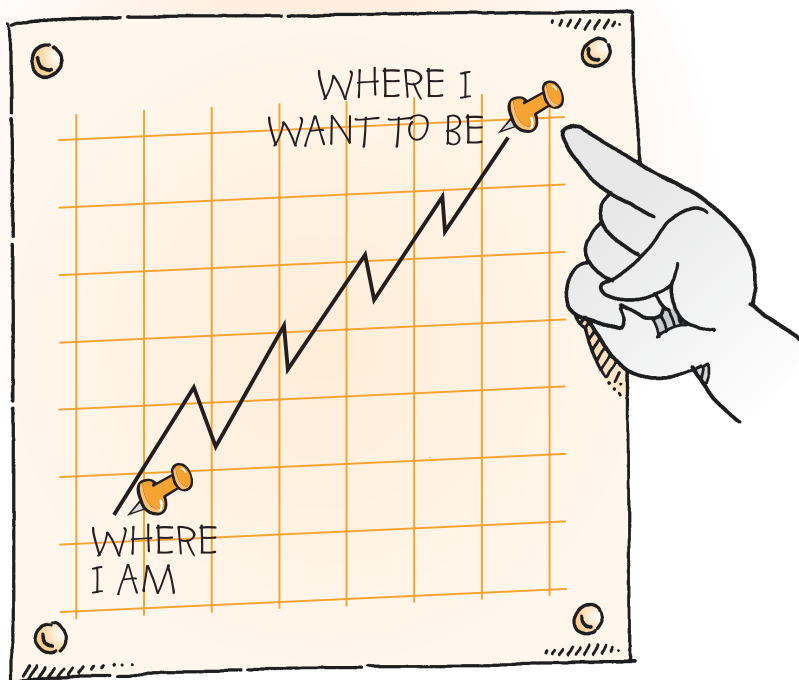
It can be tough to do. We're all busy with work and family commitments. Even so, there's a way to do your part. The things you do at home—talking about schoolwork, setting a schedule for studying, even listening to your teen practice a drum solo—are all parent involvement.



If you're ready to get more involved, here are some tips:

- **Help him see around corners.** Teens are notoriously bad planners. If they have a big paper due, they think they can do it at the last minute. One of the most important things you can do is help your teen think ahead: "Just in case the library is closed on Sunday, why don't you check out those books today?"
- **Stay in touch with the school.** Getting to know your teen's teachers is just as important in high school as it was when she was younger. Attend Back-to-School Night. Go to a game or a concert. Be sure the teachers know how to get in touch with you.

- **Be your teen's best supporter.** If she likes to sing, go to her concerts. If she plays soccer, cheer her on from the sidelines. Your teen may say, "I don't care if you come." Don't believe her—it *does* matter.
- **Get to know your teen's friends.** They can also be powerful influences on her behavior. Step in if you see them acting in ways that are against your family's values. Continue to talk with your teen about the importance of doing well in school.
- **Help your teen set goals for the future.** Teens who can see where they're going are more likely to do the necessary work to get them there.



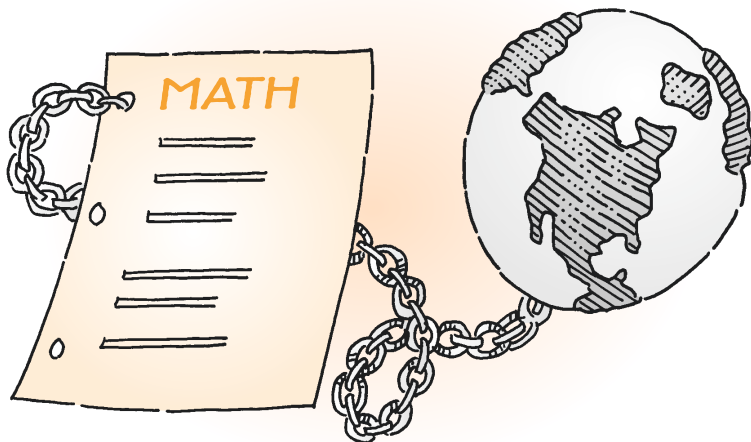
Great ways to be involved

Here are some great ways you can be involved with your teen's education. All of them are things you can do at home—and all of them will help your child do better in school.



- **Understand what your teen is doing online.** Just because he is sitting in front of a computer doesn't mean your teen is doing homework. With access to social media, your teen may have a group of friends you've never met. It's important for you to know what your teen is doing during the hours he spends online—and who he's chatting with.
- **Help your school.** There are lots of ways you can help your child's school do a better job—even if you have work or family obligations. If you have computer skills, offer to work on the school website or create an email list for your teen's class. If you speak a second language, offer to translate materials.
- **Stress attendance.** Missing school regularly is often a warning sign that a teen may fail or drop out of school. Your teen can't learn what he wasn't taught. So be sure your teen gets to school on time every day.

- **Talk about school rules and policies.** Read the school rules. Talk about them with your teen. Make sure she knows that you support the school's rules—and that you expect her to follow them.



- **Help your teen see the link** between school and the real world. Teens often ask, "Why do we have to learn this, anyway?" Share with your teen the ways you use math, writing and other skills in your job and life.
- **Help your teen prepare for tests.** Today, tests are a fact of life. As your teen faces a big test, you can help by making sure she doesn't wait until the last minute to study (because cramming doesn't work). You can also help by quizzing her or helping her review. Self-help books on specialized exams (SAT, AP, etc.) are available at all book stores and libraries. Have your student take a mock test once a week to make her more at ease when testing day arrives.

You've achieved the right balance



When your child knows:

- You love him and think education is very important.
- You support and encourage his learning.
- You expect him to go to school every day.
- You are confident he can do well in school.
- You expect to talk with him regularly about what's going on in school, about his friends, his out-of-school activities and his goals for the future.
- School is his "job" and learning is his responsibility, not yours.
- You expect him to accept responsibility for his actions and live with the consequences.
- You are not too quick to "rescue" him from inconveniences and setbacks. You allow him to learn the valuable lessons they can teach him.

And when you and your child's teachers:

- Know and respect one another.
- See each other at school frequently.
- Know how to contact one another.
- Work as a team with the common goal of helping your student learn.

Finding the right balance is one of the challenges that parents face—but it's also one that brings great rewards!

Your school wants and needs you to play a role in your teen's education. When parents and schools work together as partners, students do their very best.



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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin. Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Writer: Kristen Amundson.

Editor: Erika Beasley. Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola. Business Manager: Cynthia Lees.

Production Manager: Sara Amon. Customer Service Manager: Peggy Costello.

Distribution Manager: Marc Sasseville.

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