

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School
Santa Cruz Valley Union High School



April 2025

Reinforce the value of learning and help your teen apply skills

Doing assignments reinforces subject matter in your teen's mind. In the same way, regularly engaging in learning activities at home reinforces that learning is important, useful and can be done anywhere!

To create frequent learning opportunities for your teen:

- **Show interest** in what your teen is learning in school. Ask to hear more about a concept, or have your teen show you how to solve a math or science problem.
- **Ask your teen to research** and explore. For example, whenever questions come up during family conversations, have your teen look up answers in credible sources. Or, ask your student to collect information about interesting places within driving distance for your family to visit.
- **Discuss the jobs** people do in businesses you visit together. Talk about the education needed for those jobs, but keep the conversation casual.
- **Choose some projects** to do as a family that involve math skills, such as building bookshelves, planting a garden or painting a room. Have your teen figure out how much wood, mulch or paint you'll need.
- **Talk about current events.** Many teens have strong opinions about what's going on in the world. Ask, "What do you think, and what makes you think that?" Listen respectfully and thank your teen for sharing—whether you agree or not.



Promote math and science

Many teens avoid taking the high school science and math classes necessary to prepare for jobs in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. But taking these classes can increase your teen's future options. Discuss these facts together:

- **STEM job numbers are increasing** faster than jobs in other areas.
- **People in STEM careers** have higher employment rates than other people.
- **More than half** of people in STEM jobs got them without a bachelor's degree.

Source: "The STEM Labor Force: Scientists, Engineers, and Skilled Technical Workers," National Science Foundation, National Science Board.

Suggest self-talk to relax

High school students face many potentially stressful situations—taking a test that counts for a big part of a class grade, guarding the goal in an important game, etc. To help your teen take these events in stride, suggest inwardly repeating positive phrases like, "I've practiced this hundreds of times. I know how to do it."



Put spare minutes to work

One key to managing time effectively is to use it all—even the few spare minutes between other activities that teens often spend scrolling online. Remind your teen that 10 minutes is enough time to:

- **Skim a chapter** of assigned reading.
- **Solve a math** problem or two.
- **Make flash cards** of terms to know in the next science unit.
- **Find a source** for an upcoming paper or project.
- **Review today's class notes** and write down questions to ask the teacher.



Overcome common homework hurdles

If your teen is struggling with homework, you may both be frustrated. But doing the work yourself or letting your student skip it isn't the answer.

Instead, address common homework obstacles. If your student:

- **Is not completing** or turning in assignments, make it clear that isn't OK. Then, review organization strategies like using a planner and making daily to-do lists.
- **Doesn't care** about schoolwork, point out the connections between what your teen is learning and the world outside school.
- **Doesn't understand** the directions, encourage your teen to review assignments before leaving class and clarify with the teacher.
- **Has too much work**, ask how your teen is doing in class. If your teen is doing fine, the workload is probably right. If not, your teen should ask the teacher for help.

Also, say that schoolwork must come before other activities.



My teen never tells me anything. What should I do?

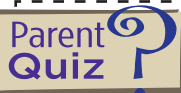
Q: I want to be the one my 11th grader turns to with questions and problems. But I feel shut out. I know junior year can be challenging, and so can growing up. How can I get my teen to open up?

A: It's common for teens to want to keep their parents at a distance. But you are right that open communication between you will help you know what your teen is dealing with so you can offer effective support.



To encourage two-way communication:

- **Start with questions.** Ask your teen: "Do you feel you can talk to me about topics that are important to you?" If the answer is *no*, ask, "How can I change that?"
- **Bring up a topic.** You might say, "I'd like to talk with you about _____. Can we talk tonight?" This gives your teen a chance to prepare or suggest another time that would feel more comfortable.
- **Concentrate on listening.** Allow your teen plenty of time to express thoughts and opinions. Ask open-ended questions. "What helps when things aren't going well?" If what you hear upsets you, delay responding until you are calm.
- **Brainstorm together** about how to address issues. Show your teen that talking to you can make life easier.



Are you reducing peer pressure's power?

Fitting in with peers is important to teens—and it can sometimes cloud their judgment. Are you preparing your teen to resist negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your teen to take pride in personal traits and achievements?
- ___ **2. Do you reinforce** your teen's individuality, and avoid speaking for your teen?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** that your teen is worthy of both self-respect and respect from others?
- ___ **4. Do you suggest** positive activities where your teen can meet peers with shared interests?

- ___ **5. Do you role-play** ways your teen can say *no*?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your teen stand strong against peer pressure. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Your self-worth is determined by you. You don't have to depend on someone to tell you who you are."
—Beyoncé

Talk about what you expect

The expectations you express for your teen's academic achievement matter. Research shows that:

- **Teens strive to reach** their families' high (but still realistic) expectations.
- **Teens' expectations** for themselves begin to match their families' expectations, whether positive or negative.

Express your expectation that your teen will work hard in school, do well and graduate. Ask about your teen's expectations, and talk about the paths for achieving them.

Source: J.M. Froiland and M.L. Davison, "Parental expectations and school relationships as contributors to adolescents' positive outcomes," *Social Psychology of Education*, Springer.

Offer tips for group projects

Group projects teach students how to work as part of a team—a valuable workplace skill. Share these success tips:



- **Divide tasks** according to people's strengths. Members will be better able to explain their part to the rest of the group.
- **Be professional.** Schedule meetings and due dates—and stick to them.

Ask your teen to think

Real learning happens when students think about the material. To encourage this, ask your teen questions that require thought. Here are some to ask about these subjects:

- **History:** *Who or what put these events in motion? Do the events remind you of anything happening today?*
- **Math and science:** *What was new to you in this unit? How does it relate to what you already know?*
- **Literature:** *What motivates the main characters? What would you do in a similar situation?*

Helping Students Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

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

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2025, The Parent Institute[®], a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

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

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com