

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

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



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Foster independent learning by supporting your teen's effort

In the high school years, teens are establishing their independence and learning that it comes with responsibility. Blending the two is crucial when it comes to schoolwork. Your teen should be the one in charge of fulfilling school responsibilities.

While it's not your job to think of ideas for a long-term science project or write a paper on the impact of the Great Depression, your student still needs your support. Here are some ways to provide it without taking over:



- **Remain familiar with the schoolwork** your teen is doing.
- **Ask your teen for details** about the school day. Say things like, "Tell me one thing you learned in biology class today" or "What does your workload look like this week?"
- **Express high, yet reasonable expectations** for your teen—and confidence that your student will meet them. When students know their families believe in their abilities, they are more motivated to succeed.
- **Offer caring backup.** Listen and ask questions as your teen thinks through decisions. Give your teen a ride to a study group meeting or pick up a needed school supply while you are doing your own errands.
- **Show that learning never stops.** Share new things you've learned with your teen. Set an example by trying to find out more.



Help your teen lower stress levels

Experiencing stressful events at home can affect students' school attendance and distract them from learning. You may not be able to remove all sources of stress. But you can help your teen avoid becoming derailed by it.

- When your teen is feeling stressed:
- **Suggest a brainstorm break.** Taking some time to stop and think about an issue may help your teen come up with a solution to the problem.
 - **Encourage exercise.** Twenty to 30 minutes of physical activity, such as going for a run or doing stretches, can relieve tension and help clear your teen's head.
 - **Recommend journaling.** Some teens find it easier to write down their feelings than talk about them. Expressing them helps relieve stress.
 - **Contact a school counselor** for help if stress is an ongoing problem for your teen.

Source: L. Flook and A.J. Fuligni, "Family and School Spillover in Adolescents' Daily Lives," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Concentrate on your teen

To turn the time you spend with your teen into a positive relationship, offer your undivided attention for at least 15 minutes a day. Let your teen choose how to use that time. It might be to discuss a problem, or to watch a funny video together. The important thing is that you focus on your teen, and show that you are willing to listen.

Make learning personal

Students take more interest in learning when the subject matter seems relevant to their lives. Look for activities based on your teen's interests that will highlight these connections. For example, to reinforce:

- **History**, visit a museum or battlefield with your teen. Could something there be the basis for a fun video game?
- **Math**, show your teen how to use it to budget for that new phone, or to design a better skateboard ramp.
- **English**, have your teen look for quotes from a book the class is reading that would be great on T-shirts.



Source: E. Blad, "When Are We Going to Use This? Strategies to Help Students Find Relevance in School Work" *Education Week*.

Fill the break with reading

Adding reading to winter break activities will help keep your teen's reading skills sharp. To make this a reading vacation:

- **Get some fresh material.** Visit the library together and help your teen find a book to read for pleasure.
- **Cook seasonal treats.** Have your teen read and follow recipe directions.
- **Wrap a reading gift.** Give your teen the first book in an exciting new series.
- **Let your teen choose** an audiobook to listen to on family trips.





How important is it for my teen to stay on the team?

Q: My tenth grader decided to try out for the school basketball team and made it. But my teen seldom gets to play, and now is frustrated and wants to quit. Would it really matter if I allowed my student to quit the team?

A: Far too often, families let their students bail out of tough situations because they want to protect the kids from disappointment and failure. But learning perseverance now can help teens succeed in the future.

To teach your teen to persist and see commitments through:

- **Discuss tough situations** you've had to deal with. What helped you get through them? Talk with your teen about some of those experiences. Say that you see this as a chance for your student to learn those same skills.
- **Help your teen understand** that few worthwhile things in life come without hard work. Athletes who want more playing time need to spend more time practicing. When coaches see that young athletes are willing to work, they are more likely to give them the chance to play.
- **Make it clear that you are proud** when your teen puts in the extra effort. "You made a commitment and you are following through. That's a real accomplishment in itself."



Are you making shyness manageable?

Experts say that shyness is not something kids outgrow. Instead, they need to learn how to cope with the feeling rather than being overwhelmed by it. Are you developing your teen's coping skills? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you reassure** your teen that lots of other teens are shy? Many shy kids think they are the only one.
- ___ **2. Do you help** your teen role-play looking people in the eye and smiling when talking?
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** preparing a few questions to ask when meeting new people?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to speak up and share opinions in family settings?
- ___ **5. Do you help** your teen find ways to work with others in

small groups, such as joining a service club at school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers means you are helping your teen interact with confidence. For each no, try that idea.

"Believe in yourself and all that you are. Know that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle."

—Christian D. Larson

Meet teens where they are

Teens' brains are still maturing, and so is their ability to make well-reasoned decisions. They still need guidance and boundaries. To supply these effectively:

- **Be understanding.** When your teen acts impulsively or blurts out the wrong thing, remember not to take it personally.
- **Know where your teen** is going, why, and with whom.
- **Make sure your teen** knows the limits and the consequences for violating them.
- **Focus on big issues.** These include things like schoolwork, safety, health and respectful treatment of others.

Keep tabs on social media

Ninety-three percent of teens use social media. Its effects on their mental health aren't completely understood, but some experts, including the U.S. Surgeon General, are concerned.

Talk about these concerns with your teen. Look together at some of the posts in your teen's social media feeds. Discuss how they make your teen feel, and whether they reflect your teen's goals and values.



Is community college a fit?

Community colleges are a lower-cost (and in some states, free) higher education option that can offer a shorter route to employment than four-year university programs. To find out if community college is a good fit, have your teen ask a school counselor about:

- **The possibility of dual enrollment** while still in high school.
- **Courses, costs** and financial aid.
- **Options for transferring** to a 4-year college after completing the two years.

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