

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

HIGH SCHOOL



January 2025

## School attendance is a vital investment in your teen's future

As some teens near adulthood, they lose motivation to go to school. But for an adulthood with career options and potential for financial security, graduating from high school is an important step.

When students skip school, they may think only about getting out of that day's work. They need to understand that they may be getting out of much more—such as future opportunities they might want.



To reinforce the importance of school attendance:

- **State clearly that you expect** your student to attend every class on time every day. Absent students miss out on class discussions, questions raised by other students, explanations and much more.
- **Be consistent.** Avoid scheduling medical appointments during school hours or allowing your teen to miss school for unnecessary reasons, such as to finish assignments.
- **Monitor absences and tardies.** These add up faster than many families realize. Check on your teen's attendance regularly, either online through a family portal, on your teen's report card, or by calling the office.
- **Establish rewards for regular attendance** that your teen can earn, such as weekend outings or special time with you. Make sure they are things your teen sees as rewarding.



## Seven tasks for 'no homework' days

In high school, there is always something students can do to keep up or get ahead with schoolwork. So if you hear "I have no homework tonight," suggest that your teen spend 30 minutes to an hour on one of these activities:

1. **Begin work** on a long-term project or paper. Starting early means your teen can think without deadline pressure.
2. **Review.** Spacing study sessions out over time improves recall.
3. **Read ahead.** Previewing material before it's taught will help your teen know what questions to ask.
4. **Clarify class notes,** and fill in any material that got left out.
5. **Create a practice test** using books and class notes. Then, you can offer to quiz your teen.
6. **Do a little extra.** Your teen could practice solving math problems, or write a summary of a text.
7. **Read something interesting.** Any reading your teen can learn from is worthwhile.

Source: R. Dellabough, *101 Ways to Get Straight A's*, Troll Communications.

## Allow input on discipline

Giving your teen a say about rules and consequences will make them more effective. Listen, then decide on measures that are:

- **Clear,** with no room for argument.
- **Logical.** If your teen fails a test, adding to daily study time makes more sense than revoking a privilege.
- **Immediate.** Choose consequences that take effect right away.

## Editing improves writing

Strong student writing is clear and free of distracting language and careless errors.

Taking time to edit and proofread is essential.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Read every word** slowly. The brain often fills in missing words.
- **Remove "filler."** Adding unnecessary words or phrases to increase word count will only weaken your teen's writing.
- **Check word usage.** Students often confuse sound-alike words such as *effect* and *affect*. Which does your teen mean?



## Put grades in perspective

Pressure to earn high grades is a leading source of student stress. But grades are only one indicator of future success. Teach your teen that:

- **The point** of education is to learn. Help your teen value the knowledge gained in classes.
- **Finishing** a challenging project and improving in a tough subject are reasons to be proud and celebrate.
- **Your student's** best effort is enough, and you never want your teen to cheat.



Source: "Parents' Values and Children's Perceived Pressure: Topical Research Series #4," The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth.



## How involved should I be in choosing my teen's classes?

**Q:** The time for choosing next year's classes is coming up. I want to discuss the options, but my ninth grader says, "It's my life, and my choice," and wants me to back off. Should I?

**A:** Class selection is a time when staying involved can benefit your student more than allowing independent decision-making. The choices students make about classes in high school can affect whether they go on to higher education and where, and even the careers they might pursue.

To guide your teen's thought-process:

- **Review the requirements** for graduation. What has your teen fulfilled? What remains to be completed in the next three years?
- **Discuss your teen's goals.** What does your teen hope to do after graduation? What classes could help your student prepare?
- **Consider the requirements** for college admission. These typically include additional classes in specific areas. For example, most colleges expect four years of English and math, at least three years of science and history, at least two years of a foreign language and one year of the Arts.
- **Schedule a meeting** with your teen's school counselor. Together, lay out a plan for your teen's next three years. Some things may change over time, and that's OK. But your student will have important bases covered.



## Are you helping your teen stay focused?

In a recent survey, 75 percent of public schools reported that students' lack of focus had a negative impact on learning at their school. Are you helping your teen develop the ability to concentrate? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you encourage** your teen to participate in activities that build focus, such as reading, sports and chess?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you help** your teen limit recreational screen use by establishing digital curfews and screen-free times?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your teen to take notes and participate in class discussions?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you discourage** multi-tasking? It is really constant switching among activities, which reduces focus.

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid** interrupting when your teen is working?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your teen concentrate on learning. For each no, try that idea.*

Source: "School Pulse Panel: Responses to the pandemic and efforts toward recovery," NCES.ed.gov.

"The simple act of paying attention can take you a long way."  
—Keanu Reeves

## Take time to look both ways

January is named for the Roman god Janus, who looked both forward and back. Doing the same this month can help your teen finish the school year strong. Ask your student:



- **What goals** did you meet in the fall?
- **How were you** able to achieve them?
- **What lessons** did you learn that will help you going forward?

Then, help your teen use these insights to plan specific actions to take to achieve goals for the rest of the year.

## Get results without a fight

Giving your teen an order—"Go do your homework right now"—is likely to lead to a power struggle if your student has other ideas. And experts recommend avoiding power struggles with teens.

This doesn't mean you should let your teen call all the shots, however. Instead, ask your teen to help find solutions that work for you both. Asking "What time will you do your work so we can still watch the game tonight?" may eliminate a fight—and still get the work in on time.

Source: J. Whitlock and M. Purington, "Dealing With Power Struggles," The Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery.

## Subtract math obstacles

When high school math gets difficult, some students feel they have reached their limits in the subject. But there are no limits! To overcome obstacles, encourage your teen to:

- **Ask questions in class.** If your teen wants to know, others probably do, too.
- **Stay caught up** with assignments.
- **Find a study buddy,** and talk through problem-solving steps together.
- **Search online** for videos and explanations of math concepts.

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