



# HELPING YOUR TEEN SUCCEED IN HIGH SCHOOL

From study habits to social media, they need your support

High school can be one of the most exciting times in a young person's life, but also one of the most stressful. The number of new academic concepts, extracurricular activities and social pressures they face can be overwhelming.

High school students whose parents remain engaged in their lives and supportive of their achievements have a higher likelihood of success. Your teen may not always make this easy. But knowing you're there is critical to their self-confidence and ability to cope with challenges. They also need your help developing good study habits and time-management skills, planning for college, apprenticeship and career, and staying healthy. When you join your PTA or PTSA, both you and your student benefit from the family engagement opportunities and other resources available to help achieve these goals.

Here are some proven ways to help your teen succeed in high school.

## Teach them the same skills for managing high school that they'll need to manage life

High school requires teens to develop and practice skills they'll need for the rest of their lives—everything from time management and problem-solving to perseverance and work/life balance. Be sure to instill the following habits in your teen.



### ■ Get enough sleep

Two out of three high school students sleep less than the eight hours a day recommended for teens by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's a serious problem. Children who don't get enough sleep are more likely to be overweight, get insufficient exercise, abuse drugs, alcohol or tobacco, get depressed and perform poorly in school. Make sure your teen goes to sleep around the same time each night and isn't staying up late to watch TV or use their phone or tablet.

### ■ Start the day right (including breakfast!)

Teach your teen to plan ahead. Every evening, they should think through the next day's schedule and activities and gather all of the homework, supplies, gear and equipment they need for the next day. This way, they're more likely to be on time to the first class, arriving calm and mentally prepared to learn.



### ■ Develop good time-management and study skills

High school brings tougher academic standards and increased competition. Your teen might have to do more to excel than they did in grade school. In some cases, students earn their lowest GPA freshman year, but improve once they learn what to expect and how to manage their time. You can help!

- ✓ Teach your teen to use a day planner or app to keep track of assignments and other commitments.
- ✓ Create a permanent workspace in the bedroom or other area of the home that offers privacy. Think mini-office with room to organize paper, folders, devices, etc.
- ✓ Make sure any study resources your high school student needs are at home or accessible elsewhere. Try to make sure that your family has library cards and a way to access the internet for homework. If you do not have a computer, schools and public libraries usually have systems available for use at no charge.
- ✓ Talk with your teen about procrastination. Assure them it's something most adults do, but that there are ways to overcome it. Discuss what will happen if they don't get the work done and how it will make them feel. Talk about how to break tasks up into more manageable parts in order to avoid getting overwhelmed.
- ✓ Teach them to ask for help. Many teens keep stress to themselves or don't want to admit when schoolwork is too hard. Encourage your teen to let you, a teacher or a family member know when they need help. Even if you can't solve the problem immediately, show them you will work toward a solution together. Adolescents should never feel alone.

### ■ Take advantage of the internet for study support

Sites like [EducationCorner.com/Study-Skills](http://EducationCorner.com/Study-Skills) have tips for different learning styles, as well as strategies for test taking, forming study groups, note taking and much more. There are so many more resources today than there were when you were a child. Search online together with your teen for help in specific areas, and if you need more assistance, ask their teacher.

### ■ Start teaching work/life balance

Homework needs to be the number one priority, but if your high school student is working late into the night or can't balance studying with other activities, work with the school on a plan for managing workload. Encourage extracurricular activities, but don't allow your teen to book so many that they have no time for rest and relaxation.

### ■ Encourage diligence and perseverance

Start teaching your teen now about the importance of working hard, not giving up and being conscientious, attentive and careful with schoolwork.

## Don't mess with stress

Today's teens are feeling the pressure of more demanding curriculum and homework, high-stakes testing and more competitive college admissions, according to a 2013 poll conducted by National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health. Nearly four in ten parents with children in ninth through twelfth-grade say their child experiences a lot of stress from school. In a UCLA survey of nearly 200,000 college freshmen, approximately 30% said they frequently felt overwhelmed by their workload during their senior year of high school.

Stress can lead to both emotional and physical health problems, whether you're an adult or a teen. It's important to manage your own stress and model good coping skills, because children emulate their parents. Both you and your teen should exercise regularly and leave time in your schedules for things that bring you joy.

Don't underestimate the role social media plays in rising levels of teen stress. Today's teens can compare their academic performance and every other aspect of their lives with their peers 24 hours a day on social media. When you were a high school student, you may have unplugged in the evenings and on weekends, but your teen rarely gets a break from peer influence.



There are certainly benefits to social media—making new connections and having greater access to information. But the American Academy of Pediatrics notes that, because of adolescents’ limited capacity for self-regulation and their susceptibility to peer pressure, teens are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with social media. Educate yourself about issues like cyberbullying, privacy, sexting and social media addiction and discuss them with your teen. You also may consider limiting the number of hours that your teen spends on social media.

## Plan for the future

Teens should enjoy their high school experience without worrying that every move they make affects their ability to reach their goals. But unfortunately, the courses your teen chooses, the grades they make and the extracurricular activities they participate in do matter. Strike a balance. Make plans for the future (college, career, armed services and technical education training), while letting them enjoy the present.

Research has shown that youth are incredibly influenced by the discussion of aspirations and goals. Foster your teen’s career aspirations by engaging them in conversations about their future. Your student’s aspirations may change frequently over four years of high school, but it is important to set goals and a plan for achieving them.

Talk to your teen’s teacher or guidance counselor about the impact different choices make on college acceptance and/or employment. Make sure your child understands and sets high expectations for themselves as well.

Take advantage of free services available for your high school student, such as test prep programs, service learning, internships, summer college enrichment programs.



## Stay involved

Show support for your teen’s school by joining your school’s PTA or PTSA, attending parents’ nights, PTA meetings and other functions. Most

schools now have websites where you can find everything from the school safety policy to contact information for teachers, guidance counselors and administrators, to personalized content such as online grade reports. Ask as many questions as you need to support your teen and be their advocate when necessary.

And finally, never forget to love your child unconditionally. While starting high school signals that they are crossing over into adulthood, understand that change is hard and their fears and anxiety are real. Talk openly and often, help them maintain perspective and praise them for their big and little accomplishments throughout this important time in their lives.

## Other Resources

There is a range of other Parents’ Guides to help you ensure your child thrives at school. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ Preparing Your Child for School
- ✓ Raising Ready Readers
- ✓ Raising Scientifically Literate Children
- ✓ Helping Your Child with Today’s Math

For these and other guides, visit [NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html](https://www.nea.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html) or [pta.org/familyguides](https://www.pta.org/familyguides)



For more information about PTA or to join, visit [pta.org/join](https://www.pta.org/join)

For more information about NEA, visit [nea.org](https://www.nea.org)