

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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*still make the difference!*



## Five strategies keep teens reading over the winter break

Just because they are out of school for a few weeks doesn't mean teens should stop reading. With time off from classes and activities, winter break is the perfect time to encourage them to pick up books—just for the fun of it!

To promote reading while your teen is on winter break:

- 1. Challenge him to read** at least one book for pleasure. Suggest that he invite friends to go to the library with him. They can wander the stacks until they each find a book they're interested in reading.
- 2. Have family discussions** about books. Encourage everyone in the family to read the same book, and ask your teen to lead an informal chat about it.
- 3. Try audiobooks.** Spark your teen's interest by listening to one in the car. Then, encourage him to download one on his smartphone. He can plug in his headphones and listen while relaxing or exercising.
- 4. Suggest a place to volunteer.** Encourage your teen to call a local nursing home and see if they need anyone to read aloud to residents. Could he read aloud to children at a day care? Or, perhaps the local library needs help shelving books.
- 5. Watch a movie** that is based on a book—as long as your teen reads the book first! Talk about how the two are similar or different. How did the characters in the movie differ from how your teen imagined them when reading?

## Promote long-term thinking in your teen



Teens can be impulsive. They often react quickly and, for many, thinking long-term

can be a challenge. Yet the most valuable things in life require effort and persistence.

Here are a few simple ways to foster long-term thinking in your teen:

- **When she can't figure** something out right away, talk about the rewards of persistence. Remind her that most of the things she has learned—from riding a bike to driving a car—have taken time.
- **When she talks** about a big project for school, talk about time management. Help her break the project into smaller steps with individual deadlines—working backwards from the due date.
- **When she shows** you the latest gotta-have-it fashion or electronic device, teach her about financial planning. How much does it cost? How can she save money for it? Help her create a plan to get what she wants.

## Emphasize attendance and help your high schooler stay focused



Winter break is right around the corner, and your teen can't wait. But is she ready to buckle down and give her best effort these last few weeks?

The weeks leading up to winter break are just as important as any other time of the school year. Even though your teen may find it hard to get out of a warm bed in the morning, she still has to wake up and go to school.

To help your teen stay focused and engaged:

- **Evaluate** how her attendance has been over the first half of the school year. Is your teen arriving at school on time every day, ready to learn? Is she going to *all* of her classes? If not, help her set some attendance goals for the rest of the school year.

- **Ask** questions about what she's doing in school. Does she have assignments that she'll need to work on over winter break?
- **Encourage** her to make a checklist of everything she still has to do for school and extracurricular activities. This will help her stay organized during these final busy weeks.
- **Remind** her that school is her top priority. Explain that you can't get out of work one day just because it's close to the holidays; likewise, she can't miss school.

**"Time flies over us,  
but leaves its shadow  
behind."**

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

## A serious study group can help your teen prepare for tests



You may not always believe your teen if he announces that he is going over to a friend's house "to study." However, studying with others can actually benefit teens.

A study group can allow your teen to share his strengths and bolster his weaknesses. It is also great practice for adulthood, when he may have to collaborate with others on projects.

The key is for your teen to form a study group in which the members *really* study. Share these tips:

- **Select members carefully.** This is a crucial part of forming an effective study group. Members should be serious about studying and want to do well in school. Teens with strong personal relationships may not work

well together in the same study group unless they are skilled at separating working from socializing.

- **Keep the group small.** Between four and six people works well.
- **Consider how to divide the work.** In a study group, each person usually handles one part of the material. It is helpful if members get assignments that play to their strengths. Then they can share more easily and explain their sections to the rest of the group.
- **Keep it professional.** Have a set day and time for meetings and stick to the schedule. Members may also want to pick a leader (rotate this position) for each meeting. Part of the leader's job is to keep the studying on track.

## Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



Teens often face some pretty tough situations—from being offered drugs or alcohol at a party to feeling pressured by a friend to skip a class. Are you helping your teen face difficult issues head on? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk about** difficult situations your teen may face *before* they occur?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you role-play** different ways to say *no*? "My mom would ground me for life!" is a favorite standby.
- \_\_\_ **3. Have you told** your teen you expect him to be honest with you—especially about serious issues?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** to your teen about the values that are important in your family?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you create** everyday opportunities to talk with your teen? Casual conversations often pave the way for more serious talks.

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are having positive talks with your teen about tough issues. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Brain research shows teens take risks when peers are watching



She's a responsible kid. So why did she and her friends get in a car and drive *way* too fast? Or skip school when they knew they would be caught?

Brain researchers have discovered something interesting about the teenage brain. They've learned that teens may actually be wired to make bad decisions and take risks when their friends are watching them.

Researchers asked teens and adults to play a short driving video game. They were rewarded for finishing quickly, as long as they followed basic traffic rules. Half the time, the teens and adults played alone. The rest of the time, they were told that their peers were watching in another room. While they were playing, researchers monitored their brain activity.

The result? When teens thought peers were watching them, they

experienced increased brain activity in certain regions of the brain. At the same time, they took *many* more risks. They drove faster. They ran yellow lights. They were more likely to crash. In other words, just knowing others were watching affected their behavior. *The peer pressure was simply the presence of peers.*

On the other hand, when adults thought peers were watching, their brain activity and behavior did not change.

What does this mean for a parent of a teen? Perhaps most importantly, never *assume* that your teen will make responsible choices when she's with friends. Before she goes out, be sure to review the rules—and help your teen think through the consequences of her actions.

**Source:** J. Chein and others, "Peers increase adolescent risk taking by enhancing activity in the brain's reward circuitry," *Developmental Science*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

# A busy schedule can affect your teen's grades and health



Your high schooler is taking challenging classes, is participating in several after-school clubs, has a new part-time job and

just made the varsity team.

All these commitments may add up to one overscheduled teen. Many of today's teens rush from one activity to another. And experts say all that frantic activity can lead to health problems. Overscheduled teens often experience headaches, irritability and exhaustion—all of which can affect school performance.

To help your teen make his own choices and learn to manage his time, provide a reality check. Help

him think about which activities are most crucial. He should focus on those, even if it means dropping others. Let him decide what changes to make.

However, if your teen's grades start to slip, or if you become concerned about his overall health, it's time to make some decisions for him.

And if you notice that your teen is wasting hours on screen media, consider imposing a digital curfew. That action alone could give him more time for sleep, studies and the activities he cares about.

**Source:** S. Shellenbarger, "Step Away From Your Over-Scheduled High School Student," *The Wall Street Journal*, [nswc.com/high\\_schedule](http://nswc.com/high_schedule).

**Q:** My daughter is a junior and she doesn't have any idea about what she might like to do after high school. Many of her friends seem to have a pretty good idea of what type of job they want to prepare for. How can I help her begin to focus her thinking?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** There are lots of teens who don't know what they want to do for a career—and that's OK. But you are wise to want your daughter to start thinking about her future.

To help her focus, ask a few questions:

- **What subjects** does she enjoy in school? Thinking about this may guide her to the types of jobs she'd like to explore.
- **What does she like to do** in her spare time? Does she like to read? Work with her hands? Spend time outdoors? Does she prefer to be with a group of friends or is she happier spending time with one or two people?
- **Can she get experience?** Could she spend a few days shadowing someone in a career that interests her? If she thinks she might be interested in a medical career, could she volunteer at a hospital?

Be sure to ask the school about resources, too. The school counselor may have information that can help her narrow down her choices. A counselor should also be able to help your daughter determine what type of degree or training she will need to achieve her career goals.

And remember, don't push your teen in a direction just because it's something you always wanted to do. Your job will be to guide her toward *her* future—not one you are imagining.

# It Matters: Building Character

## Help your teen reap the benefits of volunteering



Educators know that community service has significant academic benefits for students.

It gives students an opportunity to apply what they've learned to real human needs.

Volunteering also helps students gain valuable life experience and skills—which can put them on the path to their future careers.

While many people think about volunteering over the holiday season, community service should be a year-round priority. Ask your teen to research and select an organization that your family can help.

As a family you could:

- **Support an organization.** Some families give a monetary gift to a charity they support. But that isn't the only way to help. Find out if you can collect old blankets and bring them to an animal shelter. Could you organize a collection of canned goods for a food pantry? Would your local hospital accept a donation of gently-used books or movies?
- **Prepare and serve a meal.** A local soup kitchen or homeless shelter may need volunteers to prepare, serve or deliver meals.
- **Give the gift of time.** Is there a nursing home nearby? Ask if there are any residents who do not have regular visitors.
- **Give a gift anonymously.** Perhaps your teen knows someone who is going through a rough time. Leaving a small plant or a batch of cookies at their doorstep could lift that person's spirits.

## Have a discussion with your high schooler about cheating

Studies consistently show that the majority of high school students cheat—probably because most teens don't view cheating as a serious offense.

Teens are under a lot of pressure to do well, and many see cheating as a way to lessen some of that pressure. As a result, anything from copying someone's homework to plagiarizing a paper has become commonplace behavior.

To discourage cheating:

- **Talk to your teen.** Explain that even though it may seem like everybody does it, cheating is wrong.
- **Share your expectations.** Let your teen know that you'd rather she do her best and earn a low grade than score higher by cheating.



- **Discuss the real-world uses** of what your teen is learning. If she realizes that she may need geometry in the future, she may be more interested in learning it than cheating.

**Source:** E.M. Anderman, "Why students at prestigious high schools still cheat on exams," *The Conversation*, [niswc.com/high\\_cheating](http://niswc.com/high_cheating).

## Teaching teens values is easy with this seven-step process



Teachers want students to be responsible and respectful. And parents want their kids to have strong values. But how

can you *teach* values?

Try this seven-step process:

1. **Explain.** Talk about the values that matter to your family.
2. **Examine.** Look for news stories that demonstrate values in action.
3. **Exhibit.** If you want your teen to be honest, be honest yourself.
4. **Expect.** Tell your teen that you expect him to demonstrate your family's values.

5. **Experience.** If you want your teen to be compassionate, give him experiences where he can put that value into practice.
6. **Encourage.** When your teen demonstrates one of your family values, acknowledge it: "Thanks for being honest and showing me your English test grade."
7. **Evaluate.** Talk about times when it's hard to put your values into practice. Together, brainstorm ways to handle these situations.

**Source:** T. Lickona, *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*, Touchstone Books.