

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

HIGH SCHOOL



November 2020

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## Help your teen put developing skills and talents into action

Reinforcing what your high school student is learning may seem trickier than it did when she was younger—especially if you aren't sure you understand the material yourself. But you don't have to know higher level math, chemistry or a foreign language to reinforce many of the school success skills your teen is building.

The most important thing to do is to create a family life that values and supports learning. Here's how:

- **Encourage your teen to research** and explore. Ask her to help you find out where to get a service you need. When questions come up at the dinner table, ask her to find the answers.
- **Plan family projects** that involve learning skills. For example, for a redecoration project, your teen could calculate the amount of paint needed to cover the area, create a budget and keep track of expenses.
- **Ask your teen's opinions** on all kinds of topics. Tell her you are interested in knowing why she thinks the way she does. Hear her out, whether you agree with her or not.
- **Support your teen's talents.** Let her know you respect what she can do (even if you wish she were better at something else). Remember, her talents may become the foundation for a future career.



## Don't let your teen give up on high school

Research shows that not only do high school graduates have better job prospects and earn more money than dropouts, they are also healthier and live longer.

Teens don't always see the effect that finishing high school can have on the rest of their lives. Discuss what your teen can achieve with education. Tell her why you appreciate your own education—or why you wish you had learned more.

Source: "High School Graduation Facts: Ending the Dropout Crisis," America's Promise Alliance, [niswc.com/graduate](http://niswc.com/graduate).

## Teach your teen to plan

Teens have a lot on their minds. And when something gets forgotten, it's more likely to be an assignment than the password to a favorite game. Even if your teen's teachers post assignments online, have him write them down in a planner. Then he can:

- **See** his busy times.
- **Schedule** time to get everything done.
- **Allow** extra time for the unexpected.



## Effective writing is a multi-step process

In classes throughout high school, your teen will be asked to express his knowledge and ideas clearly in writing. Breaking down a writing assignment into steps can help him improve his results. Encourage your teen to:

1. **Prepare** by brainstorming about the topic and listing key points he wants to include.
2. **Research.** He can search online for sources on his topic for a fact-based paper. Or he can look for other viewpoints if he is writing an opinion piece.
3. **Create an outline.** Have him try different kinds: numbers and letters; connected circles; a tree.
4. **Write a rough draft.** This is the time for your teen to get his ideas on paper.
5. **Revise.** Your teen should rewrite awkward sentences and reorganize sections that don't flow logically. He may also need to add points, and repeat some earlier steps.
6. **Proofread** his final draft.

Source: S. Graham and others, "Teaching secondary students to write effectively," NCEE, U.S. Dept. of Education, [niswc.com/writingprocess](http://niswc.com/writingprocess).

## Structure supports growth

Providing structure and discipline at home helps your teen make better choices. Keep these guidelines in mind:



- **Focus on the big issues:** health and safety, schoolwork and respect for others.
- **Discuss rules** with your teen and make sure she understands the consequences for breaking them.
- **Consider granting** more freedom as your teen shows more responsibility.
- **Avoid taking** your teen's mistakes, outbursts or moodiness personally. She probably isn't trying to hurt you.



## How can I get my teen to take an interest in class?

**Q:** My teen says one of his classes is "super boring." His grades in that class are sliding fast. What can I do to stop this from getting worse?

**A:** First, you need some more information. Have two talks—one with your teen and one with his teacher. Try to figure out what the problem areas are. For instance, if your teen doesn't do the assigned work, he is likely to be lost and bored in the next class discussion. If he is distracted during class, he can't be an active participant.

On the other hand, it may be that the class is simply not challenging enough for him. Perhaps he should consider a transfer to a higher level class, if possible.

In his life, your teen is going to have to do lots of things that he doesn't find interesting. Figuring out how to make the most of those experiences is a valuable lesson. To help him learn it, have your teen:

- **Set a goal for the class.** If he chose to take it, there must have been something he wanted to learn. If not, his goal might be to get through the class without tanking his grade point average.
- **Try an experiment:** For a week, he should act as if he enjoys the class. Would he take more notes? Would he participate in class more frequently? See if making these changes can help transform his attitude.



## Are you talking about tough topics?

Part of preparing your teen for adulthood includes teaching her to handle sticky situations and challenging issues. Are you helping your teen face tough times head on? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you model** the values that are important to you, and discuss them with your teen?
2. **Do you talk** about difficult situations your teen may face before they occur?
3. **Do you help** your teen practice different ways to respond by role-playing together?
4. **Do you create** opportunities for casual talks that can lead into serious topics?
5. **Do you tell** your teen that you want her to be honest

with you—and try to stay calm when she is?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are offering your teen positive guidance. For each no, try that idea.*

"Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you; they're supposed to help you discover who you are."

—Bernice Johnson Reagon

## Expand word knowledge

A large vocabulary makes reading easier. Learning more words—and the different meanings words can have in different contexts—will also help your teen on college entrance exams. To boost his vocabulary:

- **Use flash cards.** Having to actively recall a word or its meaning works better than just reading it over and over.
- **Post a word of the day.** Challenge family members to use it in conversation.
- **Play a texting game.** Text your teen a word. Have him text back its definition.
- **Promote reading.** Reading widely exposes your teen to more new words.

## Speak out against hazing

Your teen should never be asked to prove herself in ways that are embarrassing or dangerous in order to join a club, team or other group. This is *hazing*, and it is against school policy—and in many cases, illegal.

Ask your teen if she is aware of any hazing activities involving students in or out of school. If she is uncomfortable talking to you about it, encourage her to talk with another trusted adult. Contact the school to report any concerns about hazing activity.

## Share tips for math tests

Math tests make many students nervous. But by using some simple strategies, your teen can be sure to get every point he deserves. Encourage him to:

- **Keep an eye on the clock.** Your teen shouldn't spend so much time on one problem that he can't get to the others.
- **Show all work.** The teacher may award partial credit, even if the answer is wrong.
- **Double-check his work** and ask himself, "Does this answer make sense?"



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

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

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-103x