

High School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Make your teen responsible for learning and homework

Becoming an independent and responsible learner takes lots of practice. If you want your teen to take responsibility for her learning, then you have to put her officially in charge of it.

This means you may need to take a step back and give your teen more control over things such as her homework. Tell her that she is in charge of studying and finishing her homework each night. Then follow these six steps:

1. **Agree on a set homework time.**
Will your teen study right after school? After dinner?
2. **Keep your teen's schedule clear** during homework time. Don't interrupt her study time to have her run a quick errand for you.

3. **Help your teen develop a system** to keep track of her assignments. She can write them down in a planner and use a checklist to mark off completed items.
4. **Offer support.** Assure your teen that she can do the work. Make sure that she knows where to look for help. Encourage her to ask the teacher for clarification, if needed.
5. **Remind your teen *only once*** that she has homework. Part of taking responsibility for her own work is remembering she has to do it.
6. **Leave your teen alone!** Let her prove to you that she can be responsible for completing her work on time. And allow her to face the consequences if she doesn't.

Talk about the perils of skipping class



Many teens think skipping class isn't a big deal. They're wrong. Studies show that students who

skip classes frequently:

- **Fall behind** and lose motivation because they no longer understand the topics being taught.
- **Feel disconnected** from the school.
- **Are more likely** to consider dropping out of high school.
- **Are less likely** to enroll in higher education.

Insist your teen attend every class, every day. Be sure to:

- **Make school attendance** a priority in your family. Talk to your teen about why it is important.
- **Contact the teacher** if you suspect your teen may be skipping a class. If your teen knows you will check up on him, he will be more likely to stay in school.
- **Remind your teen** that going to school is the law—skipping even one class is considered truancy.

Source: C. Azuz, "Why students skip school," Schools of Thought, CNN, nswc.com/high_skip.

These seven character traits affect your teen's achievement



Many experts believe there are seven aspects of character that lead to school success: *zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism* and *curiosity*. Studies show that students who possess these traits are often more likely to succeed than students who are intelligent but not as driven.

To inspire your teen to have:

1. **Zest**, show enthusiasm for what he is learning. "Wow, zebra fish can regrow their fins? That's really interesting!"
2. **Grit**, praise his effort. "I'm really proud of how you stuck with that geometry homework until you got it."
3. **Self-control**, give him real responsibilities. Being able to complete tasks at home without being reminded means he will be able to direct himself at school.

4. **Social intelligence**, suggest that he put himself in others' shoes. "Why do you think Will reacted like that?"
5. **Gratitude**, go beyond just making sure he says *please* and *thank you*. Discuss why he should feel grateful.
6. **Optimism**, help him see the bright side of events.
7. **Curiosity**, help him explore more about what he is learning. Encourage him to go to the library or research information online.

Source: P. Tough, "What if the Secret to Success is Failure?" *The New York Times*, nyswc.com/high_seven.

"Good habits formed at youth make all the difference."

—Aristotle

Preparation is the best way to ensure success on any test



It's simple: The more thoroughly your teen prepares for tests in any subject, the better she will do on them. And preparing for tests well in advance will make test days less stressful.

To prepare ahead of time, have her:

- **Pay attention and take notes** in class so she knows what she will be tested on. A solid grasp of the material and good notes will give your teen the resources she needs to study.
- **Create a study plan.** Your teen should look at the calendar and schedule several short study sessions. Multiple sessions are more effective than one long session.
- **Write the most important facts, formulas and dates** on a sheet of paper. Your teen should review these notes right before she goes to sleep so they stick in her mind. She should keep the paper with her so she can review them in the hours before the test, too.
- **Get a good night's sleep** before the test. Don't let your teen pull an all-nighter. It will only make her groggy and unable to concentrate.
- **Eat a nutritious breakfast** the morning of the test. It will help your teen remain focused.

Do you help your teen focus on one task at a time?



Teens are multitaskers. They send text messages while listening to music and studying for history. Is all that multitasking making them more efficient?

Probably not. Studies show that teens have trouble shutting out distractions. So they may be doing several things, but none of them well.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your teen concentrate on the task at hand:

- ___ 1. **Do you encourage** your teen to read? Reading strengthens the brain's ability to focus.
- ___ 2. **Do you turn off** the TV, phone and computer during study time?
- ___ 3. **Do you sometimes check** to see how many different things your teen is doing while he is studying?
- ___ 4. **Do you set** an example by working on one thing at a time?
- ___ 5. **Do you have** a technology curfew? After a certain hour, all technology must be turned off.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are encouraging concentration. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Try creative ways to strengthen your teenager's writing skills



Help your teen build important writing skills by encouraging her to write often. It's the best way for her to improve!

Suggest interesting and fun writing activities such as these:

- **Keep a scrapbook.** As she stores photos, ticket stubs and other mementos, have your teen write a short paragraph describing what is on the page.
- **Start a family story.** Have your teen write the opening paragraph of a story in a notebook, then pass it on to another family member. Keep the cycle going so that everyone contributes to writing a story.
- **Invent Mad Libs.** Have your teen write a two-paragraph story and replace 10 of the words with blank spaces. She should look up each missing word's part of speech and write it in the blank space. "Jake ran to the window and saw a (*noun*). It (*verb*) from the (*adjective*) tree and was never seen again!" Then she can ask family members to fill in missing words to create a funny new tale.
- **Write letters.** Suggest that your teen write a note to a family member or friend who lives in a different town. Or she can write a fan letter to her favorite author, athlete or celebrity.
- **Write a family newsletter.** Give your teen the task of reporting on big events. She can conduct interviews, write articles and send out a newsletter to family members and friends.

It's important to stay involved in your high schooler's learning



When your child was in elementary school, it was probably easy to help him with his homework or understand what he

was learning. But in high school, you face two problems:

1. **Adolescence.** Your teen is probably less likely to talk about his day than he was when he was younger.
2. **Advanced classes.** Even if you get your teen to open up, you might not understand a word he's saying about his chemistry class.

But you know parent involvement is important, and you want to stay involved with your teen's learning. So how can you help? You can:

- **Talk to him about school.** Find out who his favorite teacher is. Ask what class he finds the most

interesting—maybe he wants to pursue a career in that subject.

- **Keep up high expectations.** One-third of high school students say their parents have no idea how they are doing in school. Make sure your teen knows that he may not always *be* the best, but he should always *do* his best.
- **Attend school events.** This shows your teen that his education is important to you.
- **Be familiar** with your teen's testing, homework and project schedules. Even if you don't understand exactly what he's being tested on, saying, "Isn't your calculus test tomorrow?" reminds him that you are paying attention.

Source: S. Blaney, *Please Stop the Roller Coaster!: How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride*, ChangeWorks Publishing.

Q: My daughters just don't get along. They fight constantly and I always get caught in the middle. How can I teach them to treat each other respectfully and resolve their conflicts peacefully?

Questions & Answers

A: You aren't alone! Even the friendliest of siblings have times when they don't get along—and many parents feel like they have to be referees.

Instead of getting in the middle of every squabble, teach your teens some basic strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully and respectfully. These strategies will also help them when they face conflicts at school.

Teach your daughters to:

- **Talk about problems** *before* they become conflicts. When little things are ignored, they tend to grow into big disputes.
- **Use "I-messages."** Encourage your teens to talk about their feelings, not the other person's mistakes. Instead of, "YOU always steal my clothes," try, "I feel angry when you take something without asking to borrow it first."
- **Avoid the "blame game."** If there's a problem, it probably doesn't matter whose fault it is. Help your kids spend their time fixing the problem, not placing the blame.
- **Listen.** Your girls will never see another person's point of view if they don't listen to what that person has to say.
- **Cooperate and compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they each have a problem. To solve it, they'll probably both have to make some changes.

It Matters: Motivation

Help your teen develop inner motivation



At one time or another, most parents use rewards to motivate their kids. Unfortunately, when

the rewards stop, sometimes the desired behaviors stop, too. That's especially important to remember when it comes to learning.

Researchers have found that students who are motivated only by the desire to get a good grade rarely do more than the minimum they need to get by. However, when students are motivated by an inner reward, they are more likely to stick with a task and continue learning.

Students with inner motivation learn because they're curious. They also tend to retain what they have learned. To help your teen develop this inner motivation:

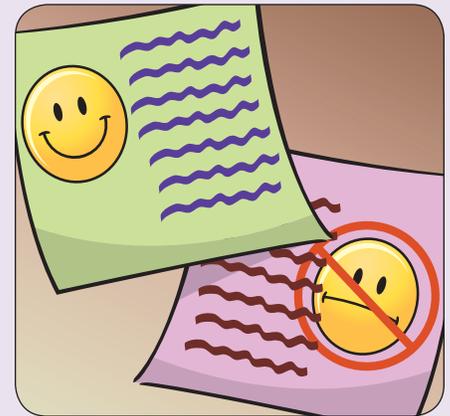
- **Give her opportunities** to talk about what she's learning. Show your interest by listening and asking questions. Challenge her to teach you something she's learned in one of her classes.
- **Pique her interest.** Before she begins an assignment, ask her what she hopes to learn from it. This simple question may help ignite her curiosity.
- **Acknowledge effort** and prompt her to think about how it feels to accomplish something. "Wow, you are almost finished gathering the research for your paper. You must feel really proud!"

Source: M.S. Lemos and L. Verissimo, "The Relationships Between Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Achievement, Along Elementary School," *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier Ltd.

Which motivation techniques work—and which fall short?

Some of the techniques parents rely on to motivate their teens can actually have the opposite effect. Here are some dos and don'ts to keep in mind as you work to motivate your teen to do chores or homework:

- **Do create a solution** with your teen rather than imposing one on him. Teens are more motivated to follow through on a plan they helped develop.
- **Do talk through problems** with your teen without taking responsibility for solving them.
- **Do link your teen's personal goals** to the task at hand. Writing the paper for his English class will strengthen his writing skills and may make writing college application essays a bit easier.
- **Don't nag.** It doesn't work, and it ends up annoying both you and your teen.



- **Don't bail your teen out** constantly. Sometimes, he has to face the consequences of his actions—or inactions.
- **Don't lose your temper.** Like nagging, it doesn't work. It just creates distance between your teen and you.

Source: J. Nelsen, Ed.D. and L. Lott, M.A., *Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Empowering Your Teens and Yourself Through Kind and Firm Parenting*, Three Rivers Press.

Parents play a critical role in helping teens become resilient



Sometimes, learning is not easy. It requires persistence and hard work. And if things are challenging, it may also require a little resilience.

Resilient students are able to handle tough circumstances. They can look setbacks in the eye and overcome them. To help your teen become more resilient:

- **Talk about her strengths.** Remind her of hardships she has overcome. Thinking about past

successes can give her strength to meet new challenges.

- **Be caring and supportive.** That will give your teen the confidence to keep trying—even when she feels like giving up.
- **Encourage her to connect** with other students. Help your teen find a school club or activity that interests her. Feeling connected to others provides social support and strengthens resilience.

Source: "Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers," American Psychological Association, nswc.com/high_resilience.