

High School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



High school students must learn how to think critically

According to a recent survey of college professors, today's high school graduates are not prepared for the expectations they'll face in college. A lack of critical thinking skills is cited as one of the reasons.

Of the instructors surveyed, 82 percent found that less than half of their students had the critical thinking skills they needed to be successful.

In schools, teachers are focusing more on deeper learning and critical thinking. This means your teen will not only have to call up a fact—but also understand how that fact relates to other ideas.

To support your teen's developing thinking skills:

- **Challenge him to form opinions** and defend them. For example, if your teen thinks there should be

a stop sign in front of the school, ask him why he feels that way. Then encourage him to write a letter to local authorities outlining his ideas.

- **Help him see other sides** of an issue. Say, "I understand why *you* feel that way. But there are other people who might say ..."
- **Give him the reasons** behind the limits you have set. For example, studies show that more teens are injured in car accidents after midnight. What a great reason to establish a curfew before then!
- **Talk about the advertisements** when you're watching TV. How are they trying to persuade viewers? Are they effective?

Source: D. Schaffhauser, "Survey: Most Profs Find HS Grads Unready for College or Work," Campus Technology, niswc.com/high_critical.

Studying can be fun with a twisting game!



Keep your teen active and make memorizing facts fun with a game. All she needs is a set of colored index cards.

On one color (yellow) your teen should write down a word, date or key concept. On another color (blue), she should write the corresponding information. Then, have her spread the cards faceup on the floor in rows of four and get ready to twist.

Have your teen put her left foot on a yellow card and her right foot on the blue card with the correct information.

Without moving her feet, she should place her left hand on another yellow card and her right hand on its corresponding blue card.

Have her keep her hands in place and repeat the process, placing her left foot on another yellow card and her right foot on the matching blue one.

When your teen sees the questions on the test, she may just remember how she twisted herself to find the answer!

Source: A. Crossman, *Study Smart, Study Less*, Ten Speed Press.

Help your teen tackle research with tools from the local library



When it is time to write a long, research-based paper, your teen shouldn't do all of his research on Google. He's most likely going to need a trip to a library. While there, be sure your teen takes advantage of many resources, such as:

- **The library's online catalog.** Your teen's topic may be found in several areas of the library. He should experiment with keyword searching. At the start of a search, have him try different keywords to see which work best.
- **Newspapers.** For a history paper, a newspaper may be a place to find eyewitness accounts. Not all past issues of newspapers are available online. Some may be

found in bound volumes. Others may be in microformat.

- **The librarian.** A librarian can help your teen find research sources efficiently. She'll point your teen to other sources he might not be aware of. She'll also be able to help your teen use online databases to find relevant research.

Source: M.W. George, *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, Princeton University Press.

“A library is the delivery room for the birth of ideas, a place where history comes to life.”

— Norman Cousins

Work with your teen's counselor for academic and social success



Your teen's guidance counselor is a valuable resource for both you and your teen. Guidance counselors are highly-trained professionals who are equipped to support students' academic and social development—from choosing classes to dealing with behavioral changes.

As a parent, you can also use your teen's guidance counselor as a resource. You can contact the counselor if:

- **You have questions** about your teen's classes. These can include scheduling questions for next year or issues with current classes.
- **You are concerned** about your teen's behavior. Guidance

counselors are trained to help students identify and work through difficult issues. Be sure to remind your teen that the counselor is a trusted adult who is always available to talk.

- **Your teen's grades are suffering.** Guidance counselors can help parents and students figure out the source of academic problems and develop solutions to get grades back on track.
- **You have questions** about your teen's future. Guidance counselors can help students decide what they want to do after high school. They can offer advice on potential colleges and careers, as well as tips for how to reach higher education goals.

Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



Teens often face some pretty tough situations—from being offered 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 kill me!” is a favorite standby.
- ___ **3. Have you told** your teen you expect her to be honest with you—especially about serious issues?
- ___ **4. Do you communicate** your values to your teen? Remember: Values are *caught*, not *taught*.
- ___ **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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Teach your teen how to show respect at home and at school



Teenagers spend a lot of time speaking to their friends. They often use slang and joke around with one another. And more often than not, they slip into this habit when speaking to teachers or other adults—not realizing that they are being disrespectful.

Talk to your teen about the importance of being respectful to others. Explain what respectful behavior looks like. She can show respect through:

- **The way she speaks.** Your teen should speak slowly, clearly and calmly. She should also address people properly by saying, “Good morning, Mr. Jones” or using their titles, such as “Yes, Officer.” And of course, using the magic words—

please and *thank you*—is always a great way to show respect.

- **Her body language.** When your teen smiles, nods and makes eye contact, she is showing people that she respects them. She should also sit or stand up straight and avoid crossing her arms or rolling her eyes.
- **Her overall attitude.** By not interrupting others, your teen is also showing respect. She should keep her cool even when she disagrees with what someone is saying. Consideration for another’s thoughts and beliefs—even if they differ from her own—is a big sign of respect.

If your teen uses these methods to show respect, she’ll be respected in turn by her teachers, fellow students, friends and family.

The SWOT method helps teens think ahead and solve problems



It can be tough for teens to plan ahead and solve problems—their brains aren’t fully developed yet. But you can help by teaching your teen a four-step process called SWOT Analysis.

When your teen faces a challenge or problem, encourage him to think about his:

- S Strengths.** He should ask himself, “What do I do well?” Considering his own strengths will help your teen feel empowered and capable of tackling the problem.
- W Weaknesses.** Taking a look at his weaknesses will help your teen head off problems before they get worse. For example, if your teen

knows he tends to put things off until the last minute, he can create a plan to help him stay on task.

- O Opportunities.** Teens are more likely to carry out a plan if they can see what lies ahead. “If I get my research paper done before the weekend, I’ll be able to go to Austin’s party on Saturday. Otherwise, I’ll have to study and miss the party.”
- T Threats.** There are always obstacles that threaten progress. It helps to think about these obstacles before they occur. “I’ll turn off my cell phone so I can concentrate on writing the paper. I’ll text my friends when I’m finished.”

Source: “SWOT Analysis,” MindTools, nismc.com/high_swot.

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

Questions & Answers

A: Choosing a career is a big decision. So starting early is a good idea. To help your son focus, ask a few questions:

- **What subjects** does your son enjoy in school? They may give him some ideas of the types of jobs he’d like to explore.
- **What does he like to do** in his spare time? Does he like to read? Work with his hands? Spend time outdoors? Does he prefer to be with a group of friends or is he happier spending time with one or two people?
- **Can he get experience?** Could he spend a day or two shadowing someone in a career that interests him? If he thinks he might be interested in a medical career, could he volunteer at a hospital?

Be sure to ask the school about resources, too. The school guidance counselor may be able to give your teen a career test to help him narrow down his choices. A counselor should also be able to help your son determine what type of degree or training he will need to achieve his 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 him toward *his* future—not one you are imagining.

It Matters: Reading

Build reading strength with challenging text



Your teen loved *The Hunger Games*. She also enjoys reading Rick Riordan novels. It's great to read those

books for enjoyment.

However, once kids reach high school, experts say they need to read challenging material. Many popular teen books are written at a fifth-grade reading level—or lower.

A steady diet of that type of reading won't prepare your teen for college. It won't get her ready for the kind of reading she'll have to do on the job.

One expert says today's teens are not going to be prepared for college or careers. David Coleman, of the College Board, describes the ability to read complex texts as “the single most important predictor of student success in college.” He wants teachers and parents to work together to get students prepared.

It would be nice if students were to pick up challenging books on their own. But odds are, they'll need a little encouragement and direction.

So what can you do? First, talk about how to build strength. Making a muscle stronger involves lifting weights. Making reading “muscles” stronger involves reading harder content.

Make sure your teen does the reading required for classes. Teachers often assign challenging works to students. She may grumble, but she'll be prepared in college.

Source: *What Kids Are Reading and the Path to College and Careers*, Renaissance Learning, niswc.com/high_teensread.

Encourage your teen to take effective notes while reading

Taking notes while reading is one of the secrets to success in high school. But students don't always know how to take good notes.

When your teen is reading an assignment, encourage her to:

- **Read at least one paragraph** or section *before* writing anything down. Then she should decide what's important, put it in her own words and then read the next paragraph or section.
- **Take notes from memory.** The goal isn't to memorize everything in the book. It's to understand what she's read.



- **Translate diagrams, graphs, tables or charts** into words. Often, these visual aids include important information.
- **Develop shortcuts** and write them in the margins. *RW* = *Revolutionary War*.

Your teen can improve reading speed and comprehension



Studies show that people who are able to read quickly often have a better understanding of what they read.

To help your teen improve his reading speed and comprehension, encourage him to:

- **Read silently.** Sometimes slow reading happens because the reader is whispering words to himself. If your teen breaks this habit, he will read faster and free his mind to focus more on meaning and less on decoding.
- **Read the material** all the way through before going back to reread. Students who read slowly may lack confidence. They are so sure they missed something that they go back and reread a paragraph several times before

going on to the next. This slows reading and rarely improves understanding. Most of the time, your teen will get what he needs from the first reading.

- **Read clusters of words** instead of single words. Meaning is easier to grasp from groups of words than it is from individual words.
- **Match reading speed** to level of difficulty. When your teen reads light material, such as fiction and magazines, he should do it as quickly as he can. He should slow down when he reads more difficult material. The practice your teen gets from reading light material quickly will eventually allow him to read everything more quickly.

Source: D. Doyle, “Reading Better and Faster,” Glendale Community College, niswc.com/high_speed.