

# High School Parents®

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***still make the difference!***



## Help your teen make time for learning over winter break

It's nearly winter break. Your teen is looking forward to at least a week off from school. She's probably thinking about sleeping late, staying up late and taking a break from her responsibilities.

While it's important for teens to use breaks from school to relax and recharge their batteries, it's also important that they include time for learning.

To help your teen be productive over the winter break, encourage her to follow a schedule. Expect her to:

- **Wake up.** Don't let your teen sleep in more than an hour past her normal wake-up time. She'll be less groggy in those early-morning classes when school begins again.
- **Work.** Your teen should schedule at least 30 minutes of schoolwork

every day. If she doesn't have assigned homework, she can review class notes and read ahead. If she is applying to college next fall, she can spend this time on her applications.

- **Write.** Ask her to spend a few minutes each day writing in a journal. She can write about anything.
- **Read.** Help your teen find something interesting she'd like to read. Then, encourage her to read for pleasure at least 30 minutes each day.
- **Contribute.** Once a week, ask your teen to take over a responsibility, such as a family meal. She can handle the budget, shopping and cooking. She'll sharpen her math skills and give you a break at the same time!

## If your teen is overscheduled, make changes



Many teens juggle lots of after-school activities. Part-time jobs, sports and clubs now occupy

the time that used to be reserved for homework and family time.

This month is a great time to evaluate your teen's schedule and to help him make any necessary adjustments for the spring.

Your teen is overscheduled if:

- **There is a sudden drop** in his grades.
- **He is always tired.** If your teen is staying up too late every night to finish homework, he's not getting the sleep he needs.
- **He seems stressed.** If your teen claims he's too busy to do anything, he's likely overloaded.

To make adjustments:

- **Be straightforward.** Remind your teen that school is his top priority.
- **Be logical.** Help your teen consider his options. What activity (or activities) should he consider dropping? What are the pros and cons of each?
- **Be firm.** Explain that you will not let him run himself into the ground—he must choose something to drop.

# Ask four questions when creating rules for your high schooler



As your teen matures, she will need fewer rules. But you still need to set limits on what is—and isn't—allowed.

The key to setting effective rules for your teen is balance. She needs independence, but you still need to keep some control.

Rules will be different for each family. But the questions to ask yourself as you are setting them will be the same:

1. **Has my teen** had a chance to talk about this rule with me? Teens should have input; however, parents should always make the final decision.
2. **Will this rule** help my teen develop independence? Teens need to learn how to think for themselves. They

need a chance to make choices and live with them. But they can't handle every choice. For example, by high school, teens can decide *when* to study, but not *whether* to study.

3. **Am I setting an example** by following this rule? If you don't wear your seat belt, don't be surprised if you discover your teen isn't wearing one when he is driving with his friends.
4. **Does my teen know** what will happen if he violates the rule? Establish consequences in advance.

**"Long before I was a success, my parents made me feel I could be one."**

—Toni Morrison

# Relating facts to something meaningful improves recall



New brain research sheds light on how memory works. And that can make test time a little easier for your high schooler.

Working harder does not always mean working better. Memorization is a case in point. Most teens memorize by repeating something over and over. Now a new brain study says there's a better way to retain information.

Repetition can help with short-term memory. But long-term memory is what your teen needs to call up a fact on a test. The best way to store a fact long term is to relate it to other facts already stored in her brain.

Here are strategies your teen can use to make facts meaningful:

- **Use rhymes.** Does she remember "Columbus sailed the ocean blue

in fourteen hundred ninety-two"? Then she knows the power of a rhyme.

- **Link them to something** she already knows. Which spelling (*stationary* or *stationery*) means paper? "*Stationery* uses envelopes."
- **Create a sentence.** "I shouldn't battle again." The number of letters in each word correlates to the year the Civil War ended: 1865.
- **Make a mental picture.** The Spanish word for *narrow* is *estrecho*. Have your teen think of the word stretched out until it is very thin. The sillier the picture, the easier it may be to remember.

Spending time creating these memory links will help your teen study smarter and remember more.

Source: "Long-Term Memories Made with Meaningful Information," Science Daily, [nswc.com/high\\_memory](http://nswc.com/high_memory).

# Are you helping your teen face school challenges?



About this time of the school year, some teens find themselves having difficulty in one class—or in several. Answer *yes*

or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are doing all you can to help your teen:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Have you talked** with your teen about his progress in school and listened to his concerns?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Have you encouraged** your teen to talk to his teachers about getting extra help?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Have you met** with your teen's teachers to develop a plan to get him back on track?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Are you working** to get your teen study support through a school-based program or tutor?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Have you helped** your teen develop study skills—sticking to a regular study time, establishing daily and long-term study goals, taking effective notes?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are doing what it takes to get your struggling teen back on track. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea.

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# Discuss the dangers of drinking and driving with your teenager



Your teen is excited to go to the holiday party—especially because some of his friends are home from college for the winter break. But there's one thing you must do before he heads out the door: Talk to him about how he will get home.

Today, car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. Roughly a quarter of those crashes involve an underage drinker.

Would your teen get in the car with someone who has been drinking? The answer may be yes. One in three high school students report riding with a driver who has been drinking.

Alcohol isn't the only thing for parents to worry about. Nearly one in five teens report getting into a car where the driver had used marijuana.

These statistics are concerning for other reasons, too. Underage

drinkers are more likely to binge drink. They are much less likely to wear seat belts or to encourage their riders to buckle up. So a teen in a car with an underage driver who has been drinking or using marijuana is at great risk.

What should you do?

- **Talk with your teen.** Discuss the risks of riding with a driver who has been drinking or using drugs.
- **Be a role model.** If your teen knows you sometimes get into vehicles with drivers who have been drinking, he may do the same.
- **Ask if there is a designated driver.** If the answer is *no*, offer to take and pick up your teen yourself.
- **Establish a code** that means, "Come get me now."

**Sources:** "Designated Drivers: You Are Not Alone," National Institute on Drug Abuse, [nisdwc.com/high\\_drive](http://nisdwc.com/high_drive); "A third of high school students ride with drivers who have been drinking," Science Daily, [nisdwc.com/high\\_ride](http://nisdwc.com/high_ride).

# Encourage your teen to use a variety of resources for research



Knowing how to research is a must for high school students. At this point in school, your teen needs more than answers. She needs to know *how to find* answers.

The internet and the library are great places to start. But your teen should consider going beyond these for major projects.

Help your teen sharpen her research skills by discovering different types of resources. By doing so, she can build interviewing skills, problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Save newspaper and magazine** articles on her topic. Sources of

information are often named in the articles. Your teen might even call a reporter. Many are happy to share information and contacts with students.

- **Make phone calls** or send emails to experts in the field she is researching. To find experts, she can look online or call the public affairs offices of universities and businesses.
- **Talk with her teachers** and other school staff, such as the librarian. This is a good thing to do once your teen has already collected some materials. Then she could ask for suggestions on books and articles that offer a different point of view.

**Q:** My senior will be sending in her college applications in January, and I know we need to apply for financial aid. Can you explain the FAFSA and what she'll need to fill it out?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the application that students must complete to apply for federal student aid. A large majority of colleges also use the FAFSA to determine how much non-federal financial aid each student is eligible for.

If your daughter plans to attend college in the fall of 2018, she will fill out the 2018-19 FAFSA. Deadlines for submitting the form vary. Go to <https://fafsa.gov/deadlines.htm> to find state and federal deadlines. Also check the websites of the schools your teen is applying to for their deadlines.

To complete the FAFSA, your teen will need:

- Her social security number.
- Her driver's license (if she has one).
- Her 2016 W-2 forms and other records of income (if applicable).
- Her 2016 Federal Income Tax Return (if applicable).
- Your 2016 Federal Income Tax Return (if your teen is a dependent).
- Her current bank statements (if applicable).
- Her current investment information (if applicable).
- Her alien registration or permanent resident card (if she is not a U.S. citizen).

For more information, visit the FAFSA website at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

# It Matters: Building Character

## Make community service a priority for your family



This is the volunteer generation. More than 15 million teens volunteer regularly, and they provide more than 2.4

billion hours of service each year. And today's youth volunteer at a higher rate than adults.

These teens are not just making their communities better—they're also doing something for themselves. Studies show that teens who volunteer are less likely to smoke, drink or do drugs. In addition, teens who volunteer earn better grades and develop leadership skills that will help them throughout life.

Families who volunteer together also see real benefits. They actually get to spend time together. They work toward the same goals. They see each other in new ways. (Who knew that Rebecca would be so good with a hammer? Who knew that Dad could speak Spanish so well?)

Here are some tips to help your family get started volunteering together:

- **Take an inventory.** Are family members already volunteering somewhere? Is it possible for other family members to join in?
- **Brainstorm.** What other causes do you care about? What organizations perform community service benefiting those causes?
- **Start small.** Choose a one-time activity. If you like it, make plans to return. For opportunities in your area, visit [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org).

**Source:** *Volunteering: Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being*, Child Trends Databank, [niswc.com/high\\_service2](http://niswc.com/high_service2).

## Encourage your high schooler to focus on three daily goals

**T**eens tend to think that the whole world is focused on them. Here's a simple exercise that can help your teen focus on other people's needs:

Ask him to spend a few minutes every morning setting three simple goals for the day. Have him think of them as the Three S's:

1. **School.** What is the most important thing your teen can do that day for school? It might be to finish writing his paper or to talk to his teacher about an assignment.
2. **Self.** What's the best thing your teen can do for himself that day? Can he go to bed earlier? Take time to exercise? Eat a healthy breakfast?
3. **Someone else.** Now have your teen think about another person. What



could he do to help someone else that day? Could he sit with the new kid during lunch? Could he run errands for an elderly neighbor?

## Talk to your teen about making difficult decisions



Sometimes, it's easy to do the right thing. If everyone is driving safely down a road, there's less temptation for your teen to speed.

But there are other times when it's not so easy to do the right thing. The teacher leaves the room for just a second during a test. Does your teen text the answer to a question to her friend across the room?

It's during those hard times when it's even more important for your teen to be prepared to do the right thing. Sometimes, the choices involved may seem unimportant,

such as whether to get up when the alarm clock beeps or roll over and miss first period. But even these minor choices can have big consequences. If she misses class today, it will be that much harder to catch up tomorrow.

Talk with your teen about these hard moments. Let her know that everyone has to make choices. Often, by choosing the option that seems harder at the time (getting up and going to school), she will actually have an easier time in the future.

**Source:** S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside Books.