

High School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Encourage your teen to make specific learning resolutions

Every time the first of January rolls around, you and your family probably make resolutions for the new year that you give up on just a few weeks later. This year, help your teen make some learning resolutions that will actually stick!

The more specific his goals are, the more likely your teen is to attain them. Instead of a broad resolution of “Do better in school,” help him come up with specific ways to improve. For example:

- **I will ask at least one question** in every class. In order to ask an informed question, your teen will need to pay attention to the lecture. By paying closer attention, chances are that he’ll be more engaged and confident

about what he’s learning—and that will likely lead him to ask more questions in class.

- **I will create a note-taking system.** The way your teen takes notes in history may be different from the way he does it in chemistry. Encourage him to talk with his teachers to figure out the best way to record information they discuss.
- **I will review class notes** every night before bed. Studies show that the last thing a person reads before going to bed remains embedded in the person’s brain.
- **I will read for 30 minutes** every day. Very few teens make time to read for pleasure. But the best way to build a strong vocabulary is to read widely and read often.

Confidence can lead to school success



Confident teens often do better in school because they believe they can accomplish goals and overcome problems.

To give your teen a strong sense of her abilities, show her that you think she is a capable person. Be sure to:

- **Praise accomplishments.** So your teen didn’t get an A on her last test—she got a B instead. That still means she mastered a majority of the material! Mention how proud you are that her studying paid off. And remind her that the mistakes she made are great learning opportunities.
- **Give her chores** and other responsibilities at home.
- **Avoid negative comments.** Instead, focus on what you admire about your teen.
- **Let her make** as many decisions for herself as your family is comfortable with.
- **Ask her to help a friend** or sibling with something, such as homework. Helping another person will give your child a sense of pride.

Focus on strategies to improve your teen's critical thinking skills



You can help your teen develop the important critical thinking skills that he'll need for his future in college or in

a career. Encourage him to:

- **Explain situations**, examples and problems clearly. Effectively describing an issue will require him to learn vocabulary and give him practice expressing himself.
- **See all sides of an issue.** Is your teen passionate about an issue? Encourage him to develop arguments defending opposing viewpoints with equal dedication. This will help him look deeply at an issue and understand different perspectives.
- **Participate in extracurricular activities.** Working on the school newspaper will teach your teen to conduct interviews and write articles from the information.

The drama club will expose him to great works of literature. The chess club will teach strategic decision-making. All of these skills enhance critical thinking abilities.

• Embrace other points of view.

Your teen will interact with people from many backgrounds with a multitude of perspectives for the rest of his life. Learning to appreciate viewpoints that are different than his own will help your teen gain new insight and will help him solve problems in the future.

"A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

— William James

Show your high schooler how to evaluate online material



The Internet can bring a world of information right to your teen's computer screen.

Unfortunately, some of that information is junk.

Whether it's for school or for her personal information, judging the merits of online sources is an important skill to learn. Your teen should:

1. **Ask questions.** When reading *anything* online, your teen should keep an open mind. Is the purpose of the website to sell something? Where do the "facts" come from?
2. **Check out other sites.** Your teen should use a search engine to find

other sites on the same subject. Comparing two or three sites side by side can help your teen see the limits of each.

3. Use different search engines.

As your teen checks out different sites, she should remember that many search engines are "pay for play." In other words, people pay to have their site pop up first.

4. Be wary of health information.

Many sites are in business to sell products. Your teen should check out anything she reads on the Internet with her doctor.

5. **Remember** that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Are you helping your teen become a good citizen?



Teens who are good citizens take care of their school. They follow the rules and they respect others. They also tend to

achieve in school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are raising a good citizen:

- ___ 1. **Do you talk** with your teen about current events and ask her opinion about them?
- ___ 2. **Do you encourage** your teen to take action if she reads about an issue that concerns her? She can write a letter to the editor or volunteer.
- ___ 3. **Do you discuss** rights and responsibilities with your teen? Teens always want to talk about their rights—but these come with responsibilities.
- ___ 4. **Do you expect** your teen to be honest? Honesty is an important part of citizenship.
- ___ 5. **Do you talk** about making the right choice even if it isn't the most popular thing to do?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your teen become a better citizen. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Four things teens need from parents during adolescence



Your teen might not be able to explain why she's often moody—but science can. Her brain is growing as

quickly now as it did during the first two years of her life. That partially explains why your teen will be laughing one minute and angry the next.

Experts agree that teens need their parents' support now more than ever. To meet your teen's changing needs so she can be successful in school, give her your:

1. **Time.** Family time shows your teen that you care about her. She may claim she'll "die of embarrassment" if you're seen getting ice cream as a family, but deep down, she's thankful you're there.
2. **Encouragement.** Believe it or not, teens want—and need—parents'

approval. Let your teen know that you are proud of her and that you believe she is capable of success—both in and out of school.

3. **Patience.** Teens are exploring a variety of things—new looks, new interests and new ideas. They're attempting to expand their horizons and explore the world. Be patient with your teen, discuss her new interests and pick your battles carefully.
4. **Nurturing.** Nurture your teen's growing body by making sure she knows how to make healthy food and exercise choices. Nurture her emotionally by reminding your teen that you love her and will be there for her when she needs you.

Source: M. Barone, M.A., M.F.T., "Living and Learning with Teens," Homefires, niswc.com/high_4needs.

Alcohol use can significantly damage teens' growing brains



According to a new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics, 79% of teens ages 15 to 17

drink alcohol. And the majority of those teens are binge drinkers—having five or more drinks in one sitting.

You probably know many reasons why your teen shouldn't drink alcohol. For example, teens who drink increase their risk of being involved in car accidents and engaging in unprotected sex.

But did you know that alcohol can also damage the very thing that is so special about your teen's developing brain—its ability to grow and learn?

Alcohol use hurts the development of skills teens will need to become successful adults.

Teen alcohol use can lead to:

- **Poor memory.**
- **Poor self-control.**
- **Aggressive behavior.**
- **Lower ability to solve problems.**
- **Lower visual and spatial skills.**

These are used for many activities that involve sight or movement, or both. Reading, math and driving are just a few.

So make time to talk to your teen about the dangers of alcohol use and binge drinking.

Source: L. Siqueira, M.D. and V.C. Smith, M.D., "Clinical Report: Binge Drinking," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, niswc.com/high_alcohol.

Q: I didn't do well in math when I was in school. Now my son is taking a math class that I don't understand. How can I help him when he's struggling with his math homework?

Questions & Answers

A: Start by working on your own attitude. Countless studies show that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in math.

So avoid saying things like, "I was never very good in math." Instead, say, "Wow, that looks challenging. I know you will be able to figure this out!"

Next, realize that you *can* help with homework—even if you don't know the math yourself. Have your son tell you, step by step, how he thinks he should solve the problem. This is one of the best ways for students to figure out a new math concept.

Remember that while there may be only one right answer to a problem, there may be many ways to get the answer. Be sure your teen writes down the steps he has followed when he is doing his homework. That way, he can show the teacher what he did. If the answer is wrong, the teacher will know where he went off track.

Also, point out times during the day when you use math. Whether you use math on the job or to balance your checkbook, your teen will see that the subject is one he can't avoid.

There are many things in life that don't come easily. Encourage your teen to try hard and work his way through this challenge. That will make it easier for him to face other challenges on the road ahead.

It Matters: Discipline

Respect makes a difference at home and school



Teens certainly think respect is important when they want it. But when they're expected to *show* respect to others, they might not think it's quite such a big deal.

It's important for teens to show respect to parents, family members, teachers and others. To help your teen learn to be more respectful:

- **Talk about ways** he can show respect. He can show teachers respect by arriving on time, following directions and participating in class. He can show classmates respect by treating them the way he would like to be treated.
- **Teach your teen** some of the basic ways adults show respect—by shaking hands and looking people in the eye, for example. Expect your teen to do that when he meets adults.
- **Correct quickly and politely.** Develop a look that silently tells your teen he needs to change his behavior. If that doesn't work, you might try just saying his name to see if he catches on.
- **Be a good role model.** Your example can have a powerful influence on him. If your teen asks to talk to you, listen as respectfully as you would to your boss. Show your teen that you respect his ideas, even if in the end you don't do exactly what he wants.

Source: W. Sears, M.D. and M. Sears, R.N., *The Successful Child: What Parents Can Do to Help Kids Turn Out Well*, Little, Brown and Company.

Use disagreements to build valuable communication skills

Sometimes, life with a teen can seem like a courtroom drama. You say something and your teen argues back.

What's a parent to do? According to child development researchers, it's not *whether* teens argue with parents (because nearly all do). It's the *way* that kids and parents disagree that makes the difference.

This doesn't mean you should back down every time your teen disagrees. But you can listen to what your teen has to say. If she makes a valid point, acknowledge it. And perhaps you can come to a mutual decision.

Teens who learn to make their points respectfully, and who know how to listen, are successful in life. These are the skills that allow them to resist peer pressure. One study found that these teens were 40



percent more likely to say *no* to a friend offering drugs or alcohol.

These skills are also helpful in school. Discussions are central to many high school classes. Your teen will be more successful if she can make her point, listen to others and find a rational solution.

Source: J.P. Allen and others, "Predictors of Susceptibility to Peer Influence Regarding Substance Use in Adolescence," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Five discipline tips can improve students' behavior at school



Your teen's behavior in school affects the teacher's ability to teach, as well as your teen's ability to learn. Try these five parent-tested, teacher-approved discipline tips:

1. **Stay actively involved** in your teen's life. Go to his games or performances. Meet his friends.
2. **Don't overlook drugs and alcohol.** They are a part of many teen parties. And they can take a serious toll on your teen's health and school performance.

3. **Involve your teen** in setting rules. He'll be more likely to follow them.
4. **Set consequences** and enforce them. Predictability is a parent's best friend. A consequence does not have to be severe if your teen knows that you will impose it.
5. **Work with your school.** If the school contacts you about a concern, keep an open mind. Don't instantly decide your teen is right.

Source: D.W. Haffner, *What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today's Challenges With Wisdom and Heart*, HarperCollins.