

# High School Parents®

October 2017  
Vol. 25, No. 2

Educational Service Unit #8

*still make the difference!*



## Increasing play can reduce your high schooler's stress

If you think you're under stress, talk to your teen. Studies show that today's teens may be even more stressed than their parents—and that can affect teens' sleep, grades and health.

An effective way to help your teen cope is to encourage her to build in some time for fun and relaxation. Here are four ideas:

1. **Make study time playful.** Ask your teen to act out a scene from her history book, or create a rap about her chemistry homework. Play can boost brain function. So, teens who learn through fun are more likely to remember what they study!
2. **Play recreational sports**—just for fun. For too many teens, sports have become another thing on their

to-do list. They concentrate on one sport rather than trying several. They worry about making the varsity or a travel team. But sports are also supposed to be something that teens *play*. So be sure your teen finds time to play a game just because she enjoys it.

3. **Create art.** The act of making something beautiful can help your teen see things in a new way. Suggest she paint a picture, design a piece of clothing or join a singing group.
4. **Explore.** Teens are naturally curious. So, encourage your teen to go on adventures. She could go on a hike with a friend or check out a local art exhibit.

**Source:** Z. Stavelly, "How to Bring Playfulness to High School Students," *Mind/Shift*, [niswc.com/high\\_play](http://niswc.com/high_play).

## Connect with your teen's counselor



During your teen's high school years, he'll have many teachers and coaches. He'll take

lots of different classes and participate in various activities.

But there's one person who will see the whole picture and who will follow your teen's progress throughout his high school career. That person is his school guidance counselor.

Your teen's guidance counselor can help you and your teen make wise choices when it's time to select classes. If your teen is heading for college, the counselor will help him make sure he has the classes he needs to graduate and to meet admission requirements. Then, when it's time to apply for college, the counselor can suggest schools that are a good match.

So when should you and your teen meet with his guidance counselor? As early as possible. Schedule an appointment for the three of you to get together in order to map out a path to success for your teen. Plan to touch base with the counselor at least twice each semester to ensure your teen stays on track.

# Build your teen's character with a positive volunteer experience



To build your teen's character, encourage her to take some time to volunteer. Teens who volunteer regularly:

- **Are less likely** to use drugs.
- **Are less likely** to be sexually active.
- **Are more likely** to develop a strong work ethic.
- **Are more likely** to be active participants in their communities as adults.
- **Gain important skills** and experiences that can be listed on college applications or résumés.

To help your high schooler have a positive volunteering experience:

- **Discuss her strengths** and interests. Help your teen find a cause she feels strongly about. Then, review her schedule.

If she has a lot of free time, volunteering regularly at a local hospital may be right for her. If her schedule is pretty full, she could participate in a volunteer program from home (such as packing care packages to send to troops overseas).

- **Encourage her to stay committed.** Remind your teen that volunteering is a job—she has to show up when she says she will.

**Source:** S. Bhaskar, M.D., "Teaching teens to volunteer; the importance of community service," *ChildrensMD*, [niscw.com/high\\_volunteer](http://niscw.com/high_volunteer).

**"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention."**

—Oscar Wilde

# Pleasure reading strengthens vocabulary and comprehension



Your teen already does a lot of school-related reading—he's reading a novel for English class and he spent an hour reading

his biology textbook last night. So why is it important for him to make time for pleasure reading, too?

When teens read for fun, they don't worry about memorizing every detail for an upcoming test. They enjoy what they read and are likely to read faster.

Teens who are able to read quickly also understand more of what they read. Their reading comprehension improves and their vocabularies grow—and these benefits carry over into success in school-related reading as well as on standardized tests.

Here are ways to encourage your teen to read for pleasure:

- **Show him that reading is fun.** If you're reading something you enjoy, share it.
- **Read what your teen reads.** Pick up a magazine or book your teen is reading. Talk about how it connects to something in your life. Ask your teen to do the same.
- **Listen to audiobooks.** Books that are too challenging to read alone can come to life when they are read aloud. As your teen listens to a book, he is strengthening his vocabulary, fluency and listening skills. He can listen to them while exercising, riding in the car or just relaxing.
- **Remind your teen** that he doesn't have to finish every book he is reading for pleasure. If the book is boring or too hard to read, encourage him to try another.

# Are you helping your teen avoid the senior slump?



Ask any teacher and you'll learn that "senior slump" affects most seniors. They don't want to study. They don't want to come to class

on time. In fact, many don't want to come to class at all!

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are helping your teen avoid the senior slump:

\_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about why he can't let his grades drop too much? Colleges can (and do) take back their offers of admission!

\_\_\_ **2. Are you making** sure your teen's attendance doesn't slip?

\_\_\_ **3. Have you planned** some fun senior activities with other parents that will give your teen a reason to want to stay active?

\_\_\_ **4. Are you giving** your teen a chance to gain work experiences—interning in an office, volunteering?

\_\_\_ **5. Are you trying** to relax and enjoy your teen? Next year, he may not be living with you.

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you're helping your teen stay focused his senior year. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1291

For subscription information call or write:  
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Show your teen how to create a positive online reputation



Teens do most of their communicating on social media. But many don't realize that bad choices online can hurt their chances for the college or job they really want.

Of course, students have the right to free speech. But courts have set limits on what students can say in school. They can't promote drug or alcohol use. They can't use lewd or obscene speech. They can't say things that will disrupt classes or school activities. In many states, sexting is illegal.

And there's a big difference between what students are *allowed* to do and what they *should* do online. Colleges and employers check out students on social media.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Check his privacy settings.** All his posts, even past posts, should be private—available only to friends.

- **Make his passwords private.** His friends should not be able to post anything on his accounts.
- **Delete inappropriate posts.** Nothing really ever goes away on the internet; however, cleaning up social media accounts is a good first step.
- **Focus on creating** a positive reputation. He can share articles and photos about issues he cares about. Perhaps he can even try his hand at writing a short blog or two.
- **Follow colleges** he's interested in attending. If he sees something that interests him, he should reach out to the school.
- **Remember** the most important piece of advice: Always think before you post.

**Sources:** E. Milovidov, "College-Bound Students: Create a Positive Digital Footprint," Family Online Safety Institute; National Coalition Against Censorship, "Watch What You Tweet: Schools, Censorship, and Social Media."

**Q:** My daughter's worrying has *me* worried. Before every test, she's sure she will fail. As a result, she does worse than she would if she could relax. She also worries about being popular. So she goes overboard. On her last group project, she did the work of four people. She is a good student and a nice kid. How can I help her worry a little less?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** The teen years can be tough. But it sounds like your daughter is making things harder than they need to be. Because she's always worrying about the future, she's not able to enjoy the present.

Here's how you can help:

- **Foster your daughter's** sense of proportion. Not everything has to be perfect. Talk with her about times when "good enough" really is just that.
- **Set some limits** on your teen's study time. Encourage her to take a break after every 30 minutes of studying. Tell her that getting a good night's sleep will lead to a better test score than cramming all night. Then set—and enforce—a curfew.
- **Help your teen** avoid taking on too much responsibility the next time a group project rolls around. Agree to play the "heavy" so she can say, "Sorry—I can't do that part of the project. My mom says I have to help her around the house this weekend."
- **Pay close attention** to your daughter's behavior. Anxious teens sometimes "self-medicate" with alcohol or marijuana. So, be on the alert for signs that she is using drugs or alcohol.

# A part-time job can teach your high schooler valuable skills



Think back to your first after-school job. Maybe it was at a hardware shop, a clothing store or an ice cream parlor. Maybe you started your own landscaping or babysitting business. Whatever that job was, it taught you a lot of skills—most of which you probably use daily in your current job.

An after-school job can benefit your teen, too. It can teach her:

- **Independence.** You won't be at work to help her out—she'll have to learn to be responsible for her own actions. She'll also have to arrange transportation to and from the job.
- **Timeliness.** Your teen won't last long at her job if she isn't consistently on time. Attendance is just as important at work as it is at school.
- **Respect for others.** Especially in a retail or service job, your teen will have to learn how to treat and speak to others respectfully.
- **Time management.** Your teen will have to learn to balance her job and her schoolwork. Set limits on the number of hours she can work. Remind her that school is her number one priority and if her grades start to slip, the job will have to go.
- **Money management.** Your teen will learn to be more responsible with her money when she realizes how much work goes into earning it.
- **Discipline.** She'll learn to listen to—and cooperate with—the boss if she wants to keep her job.



# It Matters: Discipline

## If you want your teen's attention, stop yelling



If there's one way to guarantee that your teen won't listen to you, it's to yell at her. When a parent yells at a teen, the conversation basically stops. The teen is no longer listening, and the parent is venting frustration more than trying to make a point.

Studies have found that consistent use of harsh verbal discipline actually backfires. In addition to causing behavioral problems, frequently screaming at your teen can increase her risk for depression and academic troubles.

That said, teens occasionally do things that make parents want to yell. Whether it's missing curfew or failing a test, your first reaction may be to raise your voice. Instead, speak quietly and firmly. Try to:

- **Respond, not react.** Reacting—acting on your first impulse without thinking about it—often leads to yelling. Manage your emotions and respond calmly.
- **Realize whose problem it is.** If you lose your temper over a bad grade, your teen becomes more concerned with hiding from your wrath than with determining how to raise that grade. Remain calm and ask your teen how she plans to deal with *her* problem.
- **Take a break.** If you feel like you can't face your teen without screaming, leave the room. Take a deep breath and come back when you feel less angry.

**Source:** Society for Research in Child Development, "Harsh parenting predicts low educational attainment through increasing peer problems," *ScienceDaily*, [nswc.com/high\\_harshdiscipline](http://nswc.com/high_harshdiscipline).

## Remember these guidelines for disciplining teenagers

**Y**our teen has matured a lot since his elementary school days, but he still has a long way to go. The part of his brain that controls impulses and helps him make good decisions has not matured yet. Your teen still needs structure and discipline.

Here are some guidelines:

- **Expect the difficult moments.** When your teen acts first and thinks later, blurts out the wrong thing or is moody, it's not necessarily because he wants to hurt you. Try not to take it personally.
- **Be firm, yet flexible,** with your teen. Make sure your teen knows the rules and the consequences for breaking them. Consider granting him more freedom as he shows more responsibility.
- **Know the difference** between an *explanation* and an *excuse*. Your



teen's age and brain development may explain some of his behavior. They are not an excuse for being rude or defiant.

- **Focus on the big issues.** These include things like schoolwork and respect for others. Try not to nag your teen about the smaller issues, such as an occasional messy room.

## Talk to your teen about the negative effects of cheating



Most teens don't view cheating as a serious offense. They are under a lot of academic pressure, and cheating is a way to lessen some of that pressure. As a result, anything from plagiarizing a paper to copying a classmate's homework to using a cell phone to look up answers during a test has become "regular" behavior.

To discourage cheating, let your teen know that:

- **Cheating is never OK**—even if other students are doing it. Explain that you'd rather have her do her

best and earn a low grade than to score higher by cheating.

- **Cheating hurts her.** While there may be some short-term benefits (she doesn't have to do the homework or write the paper), she won't learn the material.
- **Cheating is dishonest.** Some teens don't realize that it is the same as lying and stealing. They're stealing someone else's work and lying by saying it's theirs.
- **Cheating can become a habit.** When teens cheat and get away with it, they are often tempted to cheat again.