

High School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Teens are more motivated to write if their writing is shared

It seems like today's teens barely communicate in whole words, let alone complete written sentences. But that doesn't mean writing is becoming any less important. In fact, the ability to write well is crucial for college application essays. It could also be the difference between your teen's getting a good job or getting passed over.

But how can you get your teen to write? Many experts believe that teens are more motivated to write when they know their writing will be seen by others.

Suggest your teen look into:

- **The school newspaper.** Participating in a school publication lets your teen improve his writing and add an impressive activity to his school résumé.
- **Writing contests.** Encourage your teen to search online or ask his English teacher or the librarian about writing contests he can enter. From poetry to fiction to essay writing, there's a contest out there that's sure to fit your teen's work. Have him check out the teen writing community at figment.com for essay contests and more! Just beware of scams: Young writers should avoid any contest that asks for an "entrance fee."
- **Online literary magazines.** Suggest your teen check out websites like www.teenink.com. This print and online magazine accepts submissions from students between the ages of 13 and 19.

Show your teen how to manage test anxiety



Whether they are preparing for a driver's test or a college entrance exam, high school

students have to learn how to perform well under pressure.

To help your teen keep test stress under control:

- **Put things into perspective.** Remind your teen that tests are just a part of life. She should always do her best, but also realize that a test merely reflects what happened on one day in her life. If your teen does poorly on a test, that doesn't mean she is a failure.
- **Share a relaxation strategy.** Teach your teen to tense and then relax her muscles. She should start by tightening her toes, counting to three, and then relaxing them. She should do the same with her legs, arms, shoulders and neck. After doing this, your teen should feel more relaxed.
- **Teach visualization.** Athletes practice "seeing" themselves winning the game. Help your teen do the same, and picture herself feeling confident and prepared.

Use the media to teach your teenager about consequences



Teens don't always take the time to consider the consequences of their actions. So it's important for parents to help them

learn how to plan ahead. That's where the media—TV, news articles, magazines—can be extremely helpful.

Look for stories that highlight poor life choices. Unfortunately, you probably won't have to look far. When you come across a news item about an athlete, celebrity or politician getting into trouble, raise the topic with your teen. Then, have a discussion.

What was this person doing that led to this negative consequence? What might have happened if the person had

made different choices? How will this event affect the person's future? How will others be affected by this person's mistakes?

Talking about other people's bad decisions offers distance—and some perspective. It's a great way for your teen to think about what she might do before a challenging situation arises.

"The decisions you make are a choice of values that reflect your life in every way."

—Alice Waters

Discuss five different styles of decision-making with your teen



You know that your teen's decision-making skills will get better as she gains more experience. But did you know that she may make decisions in a different manner than you do?

Have a discussion about the five different styles of decision-making. Which type of decision maker do each of you think you are? Are you:

1. **Decisive?** People in this category often act quickly. They base their decisions on the information that is immediately available to them. They rarely change their minds.
2. **Flexible?** Similar to decisive people, flexible decision makers act on limited information. However, they are open to changing their minds. If their first solution to a problem doesn't work, they will switch to another one. And they will reevaluate decisions as more information becomes available.

3. **Hierarchical?** These types of decision makers collect as much information as they can before making a decision. They look at all the information and determine the best solution. And they stick with their decision—because they worked out all the details before they made it.
4. **Integrative?** These people are like scientists. They collect and evaluate a lot of information, but realize there are many solutions that could work for the problem. They test each idea, imagining the outcome in their minds.
5. **Systemic?** These people collect as much information as possible and come up with as many solutions as possible. They then rank the solutions from *best* to *worst* and try out each one until the problem is solved.

Source: L. Morton, "Five Decision-Making Styles for Small Business," Strategic Market Segmentation.

Are you staying involved in your teen's life?



Teens can be secretive creatures. So staying involved in a teen's life presents a parent with communication

challenges. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are doing everything you can to keep the lines of communication open with your teen:

- ___ 1. **Do you expect** your teen to tell you where he is? If he goes out with friends and his plans change, he knows to call and tell you where he will be.
- ___ 2. **Do you spend** some time each day with your teen—even if it's in the car, preparing dinner or watching TV? These are times when communication happens most naturally.
- ___ 3. **Do you attend** school events, including meetings, plays and athletic games? These promote conversations.
- ___ 4. **Do you encourage** your teen to invite friends over when you are home?
- ___ 5. **Do you plan** activities for you and your teen to do together?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're doing a good job of creating ways for your teen to keep in touch. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Help your high schooler get the most out of group projects



The idea of a group project is appealing. Students can learn more when they tackle a big project together. They can develop skills like collaboration that employers are looking for.

But the reality of a group project is often quite different. Students may not meet deadlines. One student may not do anything at all. Another student may try to dominate the group. And inevitably, your teen might get stuck with trying to pull everything together on the night before the project is due.

To help your teen make the most of group projects and avoid the pitfalls, encourage him to:

- **Choose group members carefully.** This is not the time to rely on a best friend who is also in the school play and on the baseball team.
- **Be clear about deadlines.** Group projects only work if all members

do their share. But if one person is not pulling his weight, the rest of the group still has time to fill in.

- **Allow for some “disaster” time.** Things happen—computers break down, people get sick. Your teen should make sure the group builds in extra time in the schedule.
- **Make sure one person doesn’t dominate.** Studies show that one person who refuses to listen to the rest of the group can have a negative impact on the overall project. Your teen should encourage everyone to have ownership of the finished product.
- **Ask the teacher for help** when it’s needed. If it’s a week out and no one has done any work, your teen should talk to the teacher and ask for advice on how to proceed.

Source: K. Eckart, “Group project? Taking turns, working with friends may improve grades,” Science Daily, nswc.com/high_group.

Volunteering can give teens valuable work experience



Your teen has *tried* to get a job but he’s never *had* a job. “How can I get work experience if no one will hire me?” he asks.

The answer is volunteering. While he helps others, he will also develop a set of skills that may show a potential employer that he can do the job. A teen who is responsible about meeting commitments when he’s not getting paid is even more likely to meet them when there’s a paycheck involved.

Your teen could:

- **Work in a hospital.** If your teen is considering a medical career, he should check out your local hospital. In many hospitals, volunteers

are able to interact directly with patients.

- **Create a website** or establish a social media presence for a local organization. If your teen has computer skills, he could support a small volunteer organization that doesn’t have a large enough staff to do this.
- **Help the local library.** In many places, library budgets have been cut back. Your teen might be able to plan a story hour for young children. He could create a book group for elementary school students and their parents. If he is considering a career in education, this would be a great start.

Q: My daughter had her heart set on going to a particular college. But she has just learned that she was not accepted. However, one of her friends did get in. My daughter has some other colleges to choose from, but she’s too sad to focus. How can I help her?

Questions & Answers

A: The time when the college envelopes and emails arrive is one of the most stressful for high school seniors. Students who have worked hard don’t always get into their top choice school.

To help your daughter cope:

- **Validate her feelings.** Let her know that you understand she is disappointed.
- **Share some facts.** More kids are applying to more colleges than ever before. That means that it’s getting tougher for students to get into their first-choice school.
- **Remind her that schools look** at more than grades when admitting students. As for her friend—perhaps she’s a great violinist and the orchestra needs musicians. Perhaps she’s a goalie and the soccer team is looking for players.
- **Focus on the schools** where she was admitted. Can she visit them again? Most schools have weekends for admitted students. Help her go with an open mind.

The truth is that there is no perfect school for any student. So help your teen choose a school that feels like a good fit. If in a year she is still pining for her first-choice school, she can apply to be a transfer student. But by then, she will probably be very happy at the school she chose.

It Matters: Reading

Teach your teen effective reading strategies



Your teen knows how to read. But does he know that he should use different strategies when reading for each class?

For example, if your teen is reading:

- **Math**, he should read it at least twice. The first time, he should read quickly to get an overview. The second reading will take more time. Have your teen concentrate on the key points and take notes. And those sample problems? They're not there to fill space. Your teen should work through every step of every example to understand how to go from step to step. Remind him that math is learned by *doing* and not just by *reading*.
- **History**, he should start at the last page. Have him read the questions or summary. This will give him an idea of the key points of the chapter. Then, he should check the headings and words in boldface type. Remind him to pay special attention to photos and graphs, which often contain critical information. Only after doing all these things should your teen start at the beginning of the chapter and read to the end.
- **Science**, he should start with the vocabulary. Have him write down unfamiliar words on note cards and learn their meanings. Then, he can look for the parts of the words that appear in other science terms. A student who understands that *biology* is the study of living things can figure out that *geology* is the study of the earth.

Take the 15-minute reading challenge with your teen

Studies consistently show that teens don't spend enough time reading for pleasure during their time out of school.

Yes, teens are busy. But every teen needs strong vocabulary and reading comprehension skills—and the best way to improve those is through practice. When a teen reads for pleasure, she can improve her grammar and fluency without even realizing it.

Make a pact with your teen that you will *both* spend 15 minutes each day reading for pleasure. Fifteen minutes is easy. Your teen could wake up 15 minutes earlier and read in the morning, or spend 15 minutes reading before falling asleep at night. She could read during lunch, right after school or on the bus.

Those 15-minute sessions will add up quickly. Fifteen minutes a day is almost two hours each week—or



over 90 hours a year! That's 90 hours of practicing skills that your teen will need for the rest of her life!

Are you and your teen ready to take the challenge?

Motivate your teenager to spring into the reading habit



Spring is almost here and reading may not be how your teen envisions spending a beautiful afternoon.

But you know the importance of keeping your teen reading. If he keeps reading now, at the end of the school year, the chances are good he'll be reading all summer long. And teens who read over the summer are more likely to be successful when the next school year begins.

So what can you do? Offer these reading suggestions. Your teen can:

- **Take it outside.** Encourage your teen to enjoy a warm day while getting some reading in. He can read in the backyard, on the front steps or at a park. If he's really motivated, he might consider finding an audiobook that he can listen to while he takes a walk or jogs.
- **Improve his game.** Sure, practice is important when it comes to sports. Yet reading about sports heroes could improve his game, too. He can ask the librarian to help him find biographies of the all-stars in his favorite sport.