

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Educational Service Unit #8

***still make the difference!***



## Help your teen make an easy transition to high school

**W**hether your teen loved middle school or couldn't wait until it was over, the transition to high school is a pretty big deal. In high school, classes are harder, and teachers have higher expectations. And what about your teen's friends? Some may be in other classes and some may be at other schools. How will she ever fit in?

To support your teen as she goes through this change:

- **Help her create a schedule.** Your teen will need to spend more time on homework. Her extracurricular activities may take up more time, too. Work with your teen to set a schedule that includes all of her responsibilities. Encourage her to keep track of everything on a calendar.
- **Establish some tech downtime.** Don't let your teen keep her phone in her room when she goes to bed. She can charge it in the kitchen. Don't allow phones at the kitchen table, either. Use mealtimes for family conversation.
- **Promote good study habits.** The first marking period is critical. Help your teen set a regular study time. Make sure she regularly checks her grades on quizzes and homework. If she feels like she's falling behind, encourage her to talk to her teachers about getting help right away.
- **Ask her about school every day.** How does your teen feel she is adjusting to the social aspects of high school? Let her know you are available to talk.

## Attendance should always be top priority



Attendance can make the difference between graduating from high school and dropping out.

Educators talk about the importance of attendance, but that message is more effective when you support it at home.

To promote regular attendance:

- **Discuss the importance** of showing up on time—whether it's at school, a job or an appointment. Set a good example for your teen by always striving to be on time.
- **Don't make staying home** a treat. Consider making a "no screen time" rule on sick days. Your teen will be less likely to say he's sick just to get out of going to school. If he really is sick, he can stay home, rest and read.
- **Set a goal** and offer your teen a reward for reaching it. Start with a short-term goal at first—like perfect school attendance for an entire month. Then, decide on a reward. Even something as simple as a special lunch together can be a motivator!

# Help your teenager uncover hidden strengths and interests



High school gives teens lots of opportunities to learn more about themselves. Help your teen discover his strengths

and interests by encouraging him to:

- **Read.** Reading a variety of material exposes your teen to new ideas and pursuits. Suggest that he read anything and everything he can.
- **Talk to people.** Tell your teen to ask people about their jobs. He should ask what they like best about them. Do any of the jobs sound interesting to him? Your teen might ask his friends about their hobbies and interests.
- **Try new things.** The easiest way for your teen to find out if he's

good at something is simply to try it. Challenge your teen to join a new organization or club at school, or sign up for a class online.

- **Research.** Suggest that your teen go online and search for hobbies and careers that seem interesting to him. He may find something he'd like to try.

**“Try not to get lost in comparing yourself to others. Discover your gifts and let them shine!”**

—Jennie Finch

# Teach your teen that persistence leads to success in school & in life



Sometimes it seems easier to give up on a tough assignment than to push through and complete it. However,

that won't get your teen very far in life. Life is full of difficult jobs and tasks, so it will benefit her to develop persistence as soon as she can.

Persistence and determination will foster your teen's success in school. Large projects will seem less overwhelming—and her grades will probably improve as a result.

Challenge your teen to see difficult assignments and complex projects through to the end. To encourage her:

- **Notice your teen's progress.** Say things like, “You're really coming along with that.” Your teen will love the pat on the back.
- **Teach your teen to cheer herself on.** Positive self-talk, such as,

“I am going to do this” or “I can do a great job on this,” can help her through the most difficult tasks.

- **Be a role model.** If you've been putting off a big chore, such as cleaning out a closet, decide to do it. Say, “Today, I am going to work until I get this finished.” Then keep your word.
- **Offer your help.** If your teen is struggling to complete something, a little help may motivate her to stick with it.
- **Treat your teen to something special** when she finishes a challenging task. You could watch a movie together or cook a fun dinner. When your teen shows persistence through a tough task—she deserves to celebrate!

**Source:** M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.

# Can your teen handle school & a part-time job?



Having a part-time job can help teens learn responsibility. But it can also overwhelm their ability to focus on

schoolwork. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if your teen is ready to balance school and a job:

- \_\_\_ **1. Does your teen show that she can use time responsibly?** Are you confident that she can handle her schoolwork *and* a job?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you agreed on the total number of hours your teen can work each week?**
- \_\_\_ **3. Does your teen understand that if her grades suffer, she will have to quit her job?**
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you and your teen discussed how she will manage the money she earns?**
- \_\_\_ **5. Does your teen have a plan for how she will get back and forth to work without disrupting your entire family?**

## How is your teen doing?

More *yes* answers mean you and your teen are prepared for her to get a job. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Study shows listening to music while studying hinders learning



Some students listen to music almost non-stop. There's a playlist for walking to the bus.

There's a playlist for times when they're with friends. They listen until their coach or their teacher makes them take the ear buds out!

But should your teen listen while he's studying? A reading comprehension study gives a clear answer: *No*.

Researchers in Cardiff, Wales, set out to find answers to several questions. How does listening to music affect learning something new? Does it matter what type of music students listen to while studying? Would it make a difference if the music had lyrics?

Students were divided into groups. They were asked to learn new material under different conditions. Then they took a test on what they had learned. The answers were clear and consistent. Students who studied in silence did

much better. Their grades were up to 60 percent higher than those of students who listened to music.

Whether students heard pop, rap, hip hop or heavy metal made almost no difference. It's not the type of music—it's the act of listening. When students are listening, their brains don't focus efficiently on learning.

The students who studied in silence said they had fewer distractions. It was easier for them to concentrate on the task at hand.

There are times when listening to music can be helpful. For example, it might relax your teen before a test. But mastering new content is hard. It takes focus and attention. So to make the most of study time, make sure your teen turns off the music.

**Source:** N. Perham and H. Currie, "Does listening to preferred music improve reading comprehension performance?" *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

**Q:** My son would make a great secret agent. If he does not want you to know something, he will not talk. Unfortunately, last year he kept the secret that he was in danger of failing math until it was almost too late to do anything. How can I get him to open up about things that are really important?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It was so nice when teachers sent home those folders with all the week's work. But when students get to high school, it's not as easy to find out what's going on in the classroom. You are right to make the effort. Talking about school is important for you and your son.

However, as you learned last year, teens don't always have the best judgment about what you need to know. So as the school year starts, work to open up communication with your son—and with the school.

Interestingly, one solution may be to get your son to open up about things that are not so important. Involve him in a household project. Take him for a drive. Go for a walk. When the two of you are focused on some other task, conversation may come more easily.

Talk about everyday things. And be sure to talk *with*, not *at* your son. Try to do at least as much listening as talking. Let him take the lead in the conversation. If he wants to talk about football, let that be the subject.

Meanwhile, stay in touch with the school. Be sure your teen's teachers know how to contact you—and contact them if you have concerns. Your son may never be a chatterbox, but you can find out what you need to know.

# Help your high schooler prepare for different testing formats



The tests your teen takes in high school will probably be longer and more complex than those she had in middle

school. She may also face different formats—more essays and fewer multiple choice, for example.

Your teen needs to study for all kinds of tests, but certain types of practice can help her do better with different types of questions. Share these hints to help her prepare for:

- **Essay tests.** Your teen should create sample questions based on the main ideas in the material she is studying. Then she should practice writing answers to these questions in paragraph form. She should write clear,

complete sentences and include as much pertinent information as she can.

- **Short-answer tests.** For fill in the blank and other short-answer questions, your teen needs to know facts. Memory techniques, such as making a mental picture of what she is reading may help. Chunking, which is learning facts in groups instead of one at a time, is also useful.
- **Problem-solving.** Your teen will find these tests in math or science. To do well, she will need to know how to set up the problem and how to do the calculations. Daily practice, even when there is no assigned homework, is the key to mastering these types of tests.

# It Matters: Responsibility

## Expect your teen to know & follow all school rules



If your teen is caught driving faster than the speed limit, saying, “I didn’t know” won’t keep the police officer from

giving her a ticket. The same is true for school rules. As the new year begins, your teen needs to become aware of the “rules of the road” that affect her when she is in school.

Make sure you and your teen understand rules about:

- **Attendance.** What are the consequences for skipping a class? For being late? If your teen is home sick, how should you let the school know? Also, find out what types of absences are considered excused and what types are considered unexcused—along with their consequences.
- **Clothing.** Does your teen know what she can—and can’t—wear to school? You don’t want to spend money on back-to-school clothes that your teen can never wear to school, so make sure she finds out!
- **Homework.** At the beginning of the school year, teachers explain their policies about homework and late assignments. And since rules may vary from class to class, it’s especially important for your teen to pay attention.
- **Mobile devices.** Many teachers allow mobile devices, but require students to turn them off in the classroom. Make sure your teen is aware of the consequences for device misuse. Emphasize to your teen that she should never use her phone or tablet to cheat or to take pictures of teachers and classmates without their permission.

## Self-discipline can help your teen develop responsibility

**R**esearch shows that self-discipline has a positive impact on students’ grades, test scores and attendance.

To promote self-discipline:

- **Avoid rescuing your teen.** If he forgets his homework, let him experience the consequences. He needs to learn how to think ahead and solve problems.
- **Avoid doing things for your teen** that he can do for himself. Yes, it might be faster for you to clean his room. But he needs to learn how to pick up after himself.
- **Encourage your teen** to participate in activities that develop self-discipline. Playing a musical instrument requires your teen to practice regularly.



Team sports require your teen to show up for training on time and give it his all.

**Source:** A. Duckworth and M. Seligman, “Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents,” *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.

## Teens should take responsibility for developing healthy habits



Your teen can’t learn if she’s too groggy to concentrate. That’s why establishing healthy habits is critical to her

success in school. A commitment to nutrition, exercise and sleep will help your teen start each school day ready to learn.

Encourage your teen to:

1. **Eat healthy** and well-balanced meals and snacks. She will benefit from nutritious foods such as whole grains, produce and lean protein. She should eat breakfast every day, even if it is a granola bar or piece of toast in one hand and a banana in the other as she runs out the door.
2. **Get regular exercise.** A strong body, fueled by regular physical activity, will help her stay alert during the school day. Your teen should make sure she gets some sort of exercise every day. Even a short walk after school can reduce stress and help her be ready to tackle her homework.
3. **Get a good night’s sleep.** Teens need plenty of rest in order to function properly throughout the school day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that teens get between 8.5 and 9.5 hours of sleep each night.

**Source:** K.T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, Teachers College Press and the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring.