

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



December 2016

Title 1 Cooperative

Educational Service Unit #10

Give your teen the keys that unlock the power of memory

In order to think critically about what he's learning in high school, your teen has to remember a lot of information. But for many teens, memorization doesn't come easily.

Share these tips with your teen to help him learn and recall information:

- **Break it down.** Rather than trying to memorize a list of 50 items, your teen should make five lists of 10 items each. It's easier to recall shorter lists of information than long ones. That's why flash cards are so great for memorizing—your teen can take out a stack of five or 10 cards, learn them and then move on to the next set.
- **Use humor.** Teens can remember almost anything if they can make it funny. Challenge your teen to create a silly story or song around what he needs to remember.
- **Practice.** While practice doesn't always make perfect, it can make learning permanent. Offer to be your teen's study partner, and ask him questions from flash cards or study notes.
- **Exercise.** Experts agree that physical fitness is as vital for brains as it is for bodies. Scientists have recently found that exercise releases a protein that improves memory. So get your teen moving!



Source: J. Hamilton, "A Protein That Moves From Muscle To Brain May Tie Exercise To Memory," National Public Radio, nswc.com/protein.



Maintain momentum over winter break

Your teen may want to relax over winter break. But staying on a regular schedule will make returning to school in January easier. Encourage her to:

- **Wake up.** Don't let your teen sleep in more than one hour past her normal wake-up time. She'll be less groggy in those early-morning classes when school begins again—for which both she and her teachers will thank you.
- **Work.** Ask your teen to do 30 minutes of schoolwork or reading every day. She will probably have homework she should be doing. If not, have her pick up a book.
- **Write.** Ask your teen to write your family's end-of-year letter. If she receives holiday gifts, have her write thank-you notes. She could even thank her teachers for their help so far this year.
- **Create.** Keep your teen's mind sharp. Ask her to help you in the kitchen—it's a great place to practice science and math. You could also challenge her to create a crossword puzzle for you to solve.

Work when your teen works

Many teens have several hours of homework each night. It can be difficult for them to buckle down to that work if the people around them are relaxing and having fun.

At least part of the evening, "study" along with your teen. Get a good book or some household bookkeeping and do your work as he does his. It sets a wonderful example.

Talk about tough choices

In high school—and life—students are faced with many situations where doing the right thing isn't easy. In fact, the temptation may be strong to do the *wrong* thing. Some choices may not even seem important—should your teen get up when the alarm goes off, or roll over and miss first period?



But all choices have consequences. If she misses class today, it will be harder to catch up tomorrow. Talk to your teen about these hard moments. Let her know that by choosing the option that seems harder now, she will likely have an easier time in the future.

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

The 60/60 rule aids hearing

Listening is a critical part of learning in school. But studies show that teen hearing loss is up 30% from the 1990s. MP3 players, ear buds and headphones are part of the problem. To help protect your teen's hearing, set a 60/60 rule for personal audio devices:



- **60% volume.** Keep the volume below 60% of the maximum.
- **60 minutes a day.** After one hour of earbud or headphone use, your teen's ears need a break for the day.

Source: S.D. James and K. Nathanson, "Generation Deaf: Doctors Warn of Dangers of Ear Buds," NBCnews, nswc.com/buds.



How can I keep anxiety from holding my teen back?

Q: My daughter is a worrier. Before every test, she's sure she will fail. As a result, she does worse than she would if she could relax. She's also so anxious about being popular that on her last group project she did four people's work. How can I help her worry a little less?

A: The teen years can be tough. But your teen is making things harder than they need to be.

Here are some things you can do to help:

- **Develop your daughter's sense of proportion.** Remind her that everything doesn't have to be perfect. Sometimes, "good enough" really is just that.
- **Encourage her to begin** studying several days before a test. Tell her that getting a good night's sleep before a test will lead to a better score than cramming all night. Then set—and enforce—a curfew.
- **Help your teen avoid** taking on more than her share of the work when the next group project rolls around. Play the "heavy" so she can say, "I have to help my mom this weekend. I can't do that part of the project."
- **Pay close attention.** While your teen is learning to handle her anxiety, you need to be aware of another potential danger. Anxious teens sometimes self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. So, be on the alert for signs that she may have fallen into this trap.



Are you helping your struggling teen?

By December, it's not unusual for some students to find themselves having difficulty in one or more of their classes. If your teen is struggling in school, are you doing all you can to help? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about his progress in school and listened to his concerns?
- ___ **2. Have you encouraged** him to talk to his teachers about getting extra help?
- ___ **3. Have you met** with your teen's teachers to develop a plan to help your teen?
- ___ **4. Are you helping** your teen build study skills—such as studying at a regular time, setting study goals and taking detailed notes?

- ___ **5. Are you working** to get him help from a tutor or a school-based program?

How well are you doing?

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

"Success always demands a greater effort."
—Winston Churchill

Are you a good listener?

Good communication with your teen is the basis for a relationship that will support her efforts in school. When your teen talks with you, avoid these common pitfalls:

- **Over-listening.** If you're jumping in with ideas and solutions before your teen finishes talking, take a step back. You may find out that she wasn't asking for advice, she was telling you how she solved a problem.
- **Under-listening.** If your attention is divided between your teen, a work issue and cooking dinner, set the other tasks aside for a few minutes and really focus on your teen.

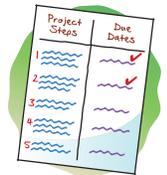
Mistakes lead to learning

Being responsible is not the same as being perfect. Sometimes, it's just the opposite. Remind your teen that responsible people make mistakes all the time. They just don't shrug them off. Encourage him to:

- **Admit his errors** and make amends.
- **Learn from them.** Responsible people try not to repeat mistakes.

Plan on a project board

Keeping track of the details and deadlines of long-term assignments can be tricky for some students. A project board can help. To make one, have your teen:



- 1. Draw a line** down a large sheet of poster board to create two columns.
- 2. Divide the project** into steps—go to the library, research, write an outline, etc. Write the steps in the left column.
- 3. Assign due dates** for each step by working backward from the project due date. Write them in the right column.
- 4. Post the project board** where she studies so she can see what to do next.

Source: R. Fry, *Get Organized: Second Edition*, Career Press.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-103x