

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



March 2017

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Confidence and positive feedback can motivate your teen to write

The ability to write well can improve your teen's performance in high school, college and the workplace. But in a time when teens seem to prefer abbreviated texts to full sentences, how can you encourage your teen to do more writing?

Research points to several factors that motivate teens to write, such as:

- **Choosing the subject.** Encourage your teen to write about something that interests her, such as a hobby or a cause she cares about.
- **Feeling competent.** Talk with your teen about the progress she has made in her writing this year (or in the past few years).
- **Connecting with readers** and getting feedback. Your teen may enjoy blogging or participating in a writing club.



Suggest that your teen consider writing for outlets such as:

- **The school newspaper** or literary magazine. Your teen will improve her writing and have an activity to add to her school résumé.
- **Writing contests.** Your teen can ask her English teacher or the librarian about free contests for students.
- **Online literary magazines.** With your teen, check out Teen Ink ([www.teenink.com](http://www.teenink.com)). It accepts submissions from kids ages 13-19.

Source: L. Ferlazzo, *Building a Community of Self-Motivated Learners: Strategies to Help Students Thrive in School and Beyond*, Routledge.



## How does your teen make decisions?

Making good decisions involves a process. But not everyone does it the same way. One theory describes five decision-making styles:

1. **Decisive.** These people make quick decisions based on the information right in front of them. They rarely change their minds.
2. **Flexible.** These people also make quick decisions, but they are open to changing their minds as new facts become available.
3. **Hierarchical.** These people collect as much information as they can before picking the best solution—and then they stick with it.
4. **Integrative.** These people collect and evaluate a lot of information, but they realize there may be more than one workable solution.
5. **Systemic.** These people collect as much information and as many solutions as possible, then prioritize them and try them in order.

Discuss these styles with your teen. Brainstorm about which styles might be preferable in different situations.

Source: J. Albin, "Deciding your direction: Are you stuck in 'Right' vs 'Best'?" Ask the CBT, [niswc.com/cbt](http://niswc.com/cbt).

## Take a reading challenge

High school students need strong reading comprehension skills—and the best way to build them is through practice.

Challenge your teen to spend 15 minutes each day reading for pleasure. She's more likely to do it if she sees you doing it, too. Those 15-minute sessions add up to more than 90 hours a year—and develop skills your teen will use for the rest of her life.

## Share media stories about actions and consequences

Many teens don't think about consequences until they have to face them. By then, it's too late. To teach your teen to think ahead:



1. **Look for news stories** that highlight poor life choices and their consequences.
2. **Share them** with your teen. You might say, "Couldn't you just see that coming?"
3. **Discuss questions**, such as: What might have happened if the person had made a different choice? How will this choice affect this person's life? What about other people's lives?

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

## Teach your teen three easy ways to reduce stress

Juggling school, friends, jobs, family and activities can be stressful for teens. That stress can affect your teen's health and his schoolwork. To help him cope, encourage him to:



1. **Try to relax.** Have your teen pause and take some deep breaths.
2. **Express his feelings.** He can write in a journal or talk to you.
3. **Plan ahead** and avoid procrastinating. He should talk to the teacher if he's having trouble completing a project on time.



## How can I help my teen get over a college rejection?

**Q:** My son has always wanted to go to a certain college. He just found out he didn't get in—and his friend did. My son was accepted at other schools, but he's too sad to think about them. What can I do?

**A:** Receiving a college rejection letter can be a devastating blow. Students who have worked hard and performed well don't always get accepted to their top-choice school.

To help your teen recover from a rejection:

- **Acknowledge his feelings.** Show you understand your teen's disappointment.
- **Explain that more students are applying** to more colleges than ever before. That means they are likely to face more competition for acceptance to their first-choice schools.
- **Remind him that grades and rigorous courses** matter most, but colleges also consider other factors. Your son's friend may be the basketball player the college team needs.
- **Focus attention on the schools** where your teen *was* accepted. Can he visit (or revisit) them? Can he talk to some current students?

There is no one perfect college for any student. Help your teen choose one that feels like a good fit. After a year he can apply to his first-choice school as a transfer student. But by then he'll probably be happy where he is.



## How do you treat spring fever?

As the weather begins to warm, many teens start to suffer from classic symptoms of spring fever: wandering attention and falling grades. Are you keeping your teen focused on schoolwork? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you stress** to your teen the importance of attending all her classes?
2. **Do you pay attention** to how your teen is doing in her classes?
3. **Do you encourage** your teen to stick to a regular study time?
4. **Have you reminded** your teen that this term's grades are just as important as her first term grades?
5. **Do you pick your battles?** If your teen is going to school

and doing her homework, don't get too upset if she forgets to put her laundry away.

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you're helping your teen ward off spring fever. For each no, try that idea.*

*“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.”*  
—Florence Taylor

## Volunteering provides real-world work experience

“How can I get work experience if no one will hire me without it?” your teen asks. Volunteering is one answer. It can help him gain skills he can show potential employers. Your teen could:

- **Work in a hospital.** If he's interested in a medical career, he may be able learn what it's like to work with patients.
- **Use his computer know-how** to create a website or social media page for a local organization.
- **Help at the library.** Leading a book group for kids and parents could be a great start to a career in education.

## Caring improves discipline

Your discipline will carry more weight if your teen knows it's done with love. Show her by:



- **Spending time with her.**
- **Supporting her choices**—or helping her learn from unwise ones.
- **Letting her know** you want to listen to what she has to say.

## Read with a purpose

Whether your teen is reading for pleasure or information, knowing *why* he's reading can help him decide *how* to read. For example:

- **To find a word's definition,** your teen won't need to read the whole dictionary. He can go straight to the word.
- **To get the most from a novel,** your teen will have to start on page one and read through to the end.
- **To understand a textbook chapter,** he should skim quickly for highlighted points, then reread more carefully.

Your teen will read more effectively if he considers his purpose before he starts.

Source: S. O'Hara, *Improving Your Study Skills*, Wiley Publishing.

### Helping Students Learn®

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: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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

Copyright © 2017, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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