

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Educational Service Unit 10

A book club can help your teen benefit from pleasure reading

High school students do a lot of assigned reading. Your teen might be reading Jane Austen's *Emma* for English class, a textbook for biology and an article about Frederick Douglass for history. So why is it important that he read for pleasure, too?

When teens read for fun, they don't have to stop and memorize details. They often read faster. Reading quickly can help them understand more of what they read. Their vocabularies grow. These benefits also carry over into school-related reading and success on standardized tests.

One way your teen can make time for pleasure reading is by starting a book club. Adding a social element can help teens *have* fun while reading *for* fun. Encourage your teen to:

- **Choose four to eight members** who will really do the reading.
- **Agree on where and how often to meet.** Teens have busy schedules, so meeting once a month may work best. Members can meet at the library, or take turns hosting at one another's homes.
- **Decide how to select books.** Group members can find suggestions and book reviews online at www.teenreads.com.
- **Enjoy the process.** Book clubs should be entertaining. Remind your teen, though, to keep the focus on the book—not the latest school gossip.



Don't forget the study step

"I did my assignments," your teen says. But completing assignments is only Step 1 of homework. Step 2 involves studying the material until your teen understands it.



So when is homework finished? When your teen has done his assignments *and* reviewed the information until he knows it.

Get to know the counselor

Your teen will have many teachers in four years. But one person will follow her progress throughout high school: her guidance counselor. The counselor can help your teen select classes and make choices that will help her reach her goals. Be sure to:

- **Make an appointment** for you and your teen to meet with the counselor.
- **Work together** to map a path to success in high school and beyond for your teen.
- **Touch base** at least once a semester to make sure your teen stays on track.

Multitasking doesn't work

For many teens, electronic multitasking is a way of life. While doing homework, they are also texting friends, watching videos and posting on social media.



But research shows that this kind of multitasking can hurt learning and grades. That's because teens really aren't doing many things at once—they are switching back and forth between them. Their focus is repeatedly disrupted.

Encourage your teen to turn off text alerts, social media and other distractions while studying. Single-minded attention to schoolwork may do his grades good.

Source: L.M. Carrier and others, "Causes, effects, and practicalities of everyday multitasking," *Developmental Review*, nswc.com/multi.



Self-discipline is the ticket to success

When teens think of discipline, they often think of parents and teachers correcting misbehavior. But the most effective kind of discipline is self-imposed. Here are four ways to help your teen become more self-disciplined:

1. **Expect her to contribute** to the family. Teens who have responsibilities at home begin to see themselves as important members of the family team.
2. **Let her experience** consequences. If she puts off doing a project, don't make a late-night dash for supplies. If she didn't study for a test, don't let her miss school to study.
3. **Allow her to choose** when and where to study. When your teen's grades show she can do that successfully, let her take on more responsibility.
4. **Pick your battles.** Not everything is worth a fight with your teen. Decide on the issues and values that are most important to you, and concentrate on those. Let the other things go.



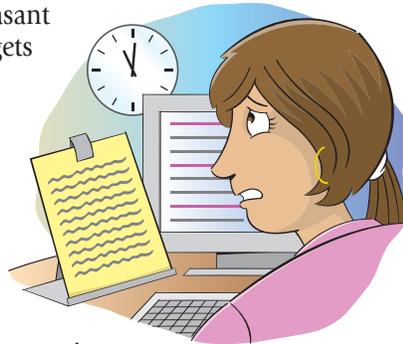
How can I get my teen to stop procrastinating?

Q: My daughter should be in bed. Instead, she's frantically working on a history paper that's due tomorrow. This isn't the first time she's left things until the last minute, and I know it hurts her grades. But what can I do to help?

A: Just about everyone puts off an unpleasant task at one time or another. But when it gets to be a habit, as it has with your teen, it can be a real problem. Learning to avoid procrastination now will help your teen in school and prepare her for college and the workplace.

Here are four ways to help your teen break the procrastination habit:

- 1. Get a large calendar.** Post it where you can both see it. Have your teen write down every assignment, test date, extracurricular activity and commitment. Then sit down together and have her set priorities. Help her schedule time for getting schoolwork done, starting now.
- 2. Help your teen divide long-term projects** into smaller pieces. Small successes lead to larger ones.
- 3. Make sure she spends homework time on homework.** She'll get more done if she knows she can chat with friends after she finishes.
- 4. Pay attention** throughout the school year. As your teen develops better habits, work with her to keep them up.



Is your teen safe from senior slump?

Many students in their last year of high school suffer from "senior slump." They don't want to study, or even go to class. Are you helping your teen avoid falling into a senior slump? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- 1. Have you talked** with your teen about why he needs to keep his grades up all year? Colleges can and do take back offers of admission!
- 2. Are you making sure** your teen's attendance doesn't slip?
- 3. Are you planning** some fun senior activities with other parents that will give your teen a reason to stay involved at school?
- 4. Are you helping** your teen gain work experience, such as interning or volunteering?
- 5. Are you making the most** of your time with your teen? Next year, he may not be living with you.

How well are you doing?

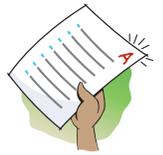
More yes answers mean you're helping your teen stay focused during senior year. For each no, try that idea.

"Motivation will almost always beat mere talent."

—Norman R. Augustine

Prepare teens for any test

As your teen begins to study more advanced subjects, you may wonder how to help her prepare for tests if you don't know the material yourself.



There are lots of ways! You can:

- **Offer test-taking tips.** Tell your teen to read the directions carefully, plan her time wisely and circle key words in long questions to find the main point.
- **Reduce test stress.** Help her see that tests are part of life. Of course she should give her best effort. But doing poorly on one test doesn't make her a failure.
- **Make sure your teen** gets enough sleep the night before the test and eats a healthy breakfast that morning.

Respond to a poor grade with a focus on the future

If you lose your temper when your teen brings home a bad grade, he may become more concerned with hiding from your anger than figuring out how to do better in school. Instead, take a deep breath, remain calm and help your teen plan the steps he'll take to raise his grade.

Volunteering pays rewards

Teens who volunteer regularly are less likely to use drugs or become sexually active, and more likely to develop a strong work ethic. Plus, they gain skills they can list on college applications or résumés. To help your teen benefit from volunteering:

- **Discuss his strengths** and interests, and review his schedule. Look for opportunities that match both.
- **Encourage him to stay committed.** Remind him that volunteering is a job—he has to show up when he says he will.

Source: "Volunteering," Child Trends Databank, niswc.com/volunteering.

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