

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

## Teens succeed when parents show that education matters

Now that your teen is in high school, you may wonder how to stay involved in her education. While your involvement at the high school level is different than it was when she was younger, it's still important. Teens care more about school when they know their parents care about it, too.

To show your teen that her education is your priority:

- **Attend back-to-school night.** Ignore all protests from your teen that "you don't have to go," and "no one else's parents are going." Go anyway. Meet as many of her teachers as you can. Tell them about your teen and ask what you can do to help her learn.
- **Talk with your teen about school.** Ask her to tell you about her classes and her teachers. Which class excites her most? Ask about school all year long, even if it's just, "What's one thing you learned today?"
- **Make sure your teen attends** school on time, every day.
- **Monitor your teen's grades** and make sure she selects the most rigorous courses she can handle.
- **Be there for special occasions.** You may not be able to make every game or hear every speech. But attend as many of your teen's school events as possible. When you can't, let her know your heart is with her.

Source: L. McMullen, "Students Learn Better with Engaged Parents," US News & World Report, [niscw.com/matters](http://niscw.com/matters).



## Ninth grade is a vital year

According to one study, students who finish ninth grade ready to enter tenth are four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who don't.



Attendance is a big part of that success. As absences go up, graduation rates go down. Students who miss key information one day can't put it to use the next. So if you want to go to graduation in four years, send your ninth grader to school today.

Source: M. Roderick and others, "Preventable Failure: Improvements in Long-Term Outcomes When High Schools Focused on the Ninth Grade Year," The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, [niscw.com/ninth](http://niscw.com/ninth).

## Say yes to responsibility

Your teen is preparing—not just for school, but for adulthood. Assuming more responsibility is the way he'll succeed. To help:

- **Let your teen make decisions.** Give him a say in most things that affect him.
- **Let him make mistakes.** Don't rescue him unless it is a matter of safety.
- **Skip power struggles.** Just be clear about what you expect and what you'll do.

Source: F. Cline, M.D. and J. Fay, *Parenting Teens With Love and Logic*, Piñon Press.



## Take steps now to prepare for college

Whether your high schooler is a freshman or a senior, there are things you both can do to make sure he's on track to graduate and move on to college. Here's a partial list (if you missed any of the items earlier, do them now!):

- **Freshman year**, your teen should tell his teachers and school counselor he plans to go to college. Help him make a four-year plan of the classes he needs to take to satisfy *both* high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements.
- **Sophomore year**, have your teen begin researching colleges. Encourage him to explore his interests by getting involved in clubs, sports and volunteer work.
- **Junior year**, your teen should prepare for and take college entrance exams (ACT and/or SAT). Develop a plan for obtaining financial aid.
- **Senior year**, your teen should write college applications. Pay attention to deadlines for applications and financial aid forms.

## Get time on your teen's side

Time management is one of the most valuable skills students can learn. It will help your teen complete schoolwork on time and lead a less stressful life. Encourage her to:



- **Use a calendar.** Your teen should write down everything she has to do, and check her schedule frequently.
- **Do a little at a time.** Studying for 30 minutes every day is more effective than cramming for hours right before a test.
- **Schedule a catch-up day** each week to work on tasks she's been putting off.



## How much is too much when college is the goal?

**Q:** My son is taking all honors classes this year, plays sports, has a part-time job and volunteers in a homeless shelter. He says he needs to do all this to get into college. How can I tell if he is doing too much?

**A:** Your high schooler's schedule sounds like the full load many teens carry today. Between schoolwork and extracurricular activities, many of them have little time for themselves.

Keep in mind that it is your son's life, and he is making choices and learning how to set priorities. You can help by asking three questions:

- 1. Does he have any downtime?** All teens need some unscheduled time every week to relax, hang out with friends or just daydream.
- 2. Does he care about his activities?** Colleges aren't looking for students who plod through activities they don't like in order to build a résumé. They want to see a connection between a teen's activities and his passions. They look for skill development and leadership. Ask your teen to think about his activities. If he is participating in some only because he thinks he has to, those may be the ones to consider dropping.
- 3. Are his grades suffering?** Remind your teen that schoolwork is his first priority.

Be sure your teen knows that you love him for who he is, not what he does.



## Are you committed to communicating?

Teens who have a strong relationship with their parents do better in school than those who don't. Communication is the key. Are you making the most of conversations with your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- 1. Do you listen** when your teen wants to talk? If you can't give her your full attention, set a time when you can, then stick to it.
- 2. Do you ask** questions to make sure you understand what your teen is saying, and show interest by asking for details?
- 3. Do you give** her genuine, specific compliments?
- 4. Do you try** to be fair? Do you hear your teen out before making decisions?

- 5. Do you admit** that you don't have all the answers?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you're making good use of the time you spend talking with your teen. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"Good family life is never an accident but always an achievement by those who share it."*

*—James H.S. Bossard*

## Urge effort, not perfection

As teens work to be college and career ready, many feel they must earn perfect grades. Of course, your teen should do his best. But insisting on perfection is unrealistic. To dial down your teen's stress level:

- **Be clear** about the message you're sending. You want your teen to *do* his best, not *be* the best.
- **Put college pressure** into perspective. Some schools *are* hard to get into. But there are many great schools out there. Assure your teen you'll help him find one that's the right fit.

Source: *Education and Health in Schools: A Survey of Parents*, NPR and others, [niscw.com/stress](http://niscw.com/stress).

## Listening supports thinking

As high school students begin to think in a more complex way, they often take more interest in the world around them. They may point out differences between what adults say and do. And they may feel that "no one" understands what's going on.

Show your teen you care what she thinks. Listen to her ideas, opinions and concerns. Share your own, too. Encourage her to find out more about causes she cares about.

## Build useful study habits

Teens who don't know how to study effectively may spend more time than they need to on schoolwork. Or they may get frustrated and stop studying.



Share these study strategies with your teen:

- **Take notes in class** and review the notes each evening.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Your teen should turn off recreational electronics and take care of his hunger and thirst before sitting down to study.
- **Study similar subjects** at different times. Between math formulas and science formulas, study English or history.

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