

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



December 2011

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Responsibility begins at home

Responsible teens know that their actions matter—and that the consequences are theirs to deal with as well. Expect your teen to be responsible about her:

- **Chores.** Completing tasks around your home should be a regular part of your teen's life. Be specific about what you expect her to do and when.
- **House key.** A key to your home isn't a right—it's a responsibility. Discuss the importance of locking the door. Talk about the dangers of losing a key or lending it to a friend. Make sure your teen understands that a small house key is a big deal.
- **Curfew.** Talk about your teen's curfew and what the consequences of missing it will be. Stop yourself from calling 10 minutes before curfew with a reminder—trust your teen to come home on time. And enforce the consequences if she is late.
- **Homework.** If you have to nag your teen to complete her homework, she's not being responsible. Establish expectations for completing assignments on time. If she fails to follow through, consider enforcing consequences such as loss of TV, phone or driving privileges



Remind your teen that the more responsibility she shows, the more independence you will be able to give her. Responsibilities like these also build integrity and a strong work ethic—two characteristics that will help her succeed in school and in life.



## Encourage your teen to volunteer

December is often thought of as "the month for giving." Have your teen take a break from holiday shopping. Ask what he can do for others in your community. During the school break he might volunteer:

- **At the local humane society.** Many need volunteers to help "socialize" rescued animals.
  - **At the local library.** Often a volunteer is needed to help put books back on the shelves.
  - **At a senior citizen facility.** Volunteers read to residents and help with activities.
- Teens who give back to their communities often have higher self-esteem and are more courteous to others. They also gain valuable work experience—which will look great on a college application or résumé. If your teen isn't sure where to volunteer, encourage him to talk to his guidance counselor.

Source: R. Paxton, "Building Teen Character: Volunteering for Community Service," SelfGrowth.com, [www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Paxton1.html](http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Paxton1.html).

## Parties must be monitored

Holiday parties are great—if teens are properly supervised. Statistics indicate that seven in 10 teens report that drinking takes place at parties where parents aren't home. What can you do? Monitor your teen. Research shows that teens who don't drink are most influenced by their parents.

Source: "Underage Drinking Research," The Century Council, [www.centurycouncil.org/learn-the-facts/underage-drinking-research](http://www.centurycouncil.org/learn-the-facts/underage-drinking-research).

## Make sure your teen has a sleep plan for winter break

It may be a break from school, but don't let your teen sleep more than an hour past his normal wake-up time. If he sticks to this plan, he'll be less groggy in those early-morning classes when school begins again—for which both he *and* his teachers will thank you.



## Keep your high schooler learning all winter long

Learning doesn't need to stop just because school isn't in session! Your teen can:

- **Work.** Ask her to do a little bit of schoolwork or reading every day.
- **Write.** Enlist your teen in writing and addressing holiday cards or thank-you notes. She might even consider writing holiday cards to her teachers thanking them for their help so far this year.
- **Create.** Keep your teen's mind going. Ask her to help you in the kitchen—that's a great place to practice science and math.





## How can parents support overly anxious teenagers?

**Q:** My son worries about *everything*. Before every test, he's sure he will fail. As a result, he does worse than he would if he could relax. Because he worries about being popular, he tries too hard to please his classmates. On his last group project, he ended up doing most of the work. How can I help him?

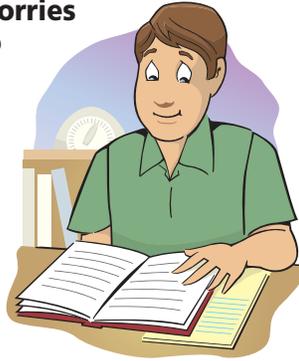
**A:** The teen years can be tough. It sounds like your son doesn't feel confident, and ends up just making things harder for himself. Many teens react to pressure by trying too hard.

Help him develop a sense of proportion. For example, not everything has to be perfect. There are times when "good enough" really is just that.

Set some limits on how he studies. Tell him that getting a good night's sleep will lead to a better test score than cramming all night. Then set—and enforce—a "studying curfew."

When the next group project rolls around, keep him from taking on too much responsibility. Encourage the group to create a chart that shows what each member will do.

While your son is learning to handle his anxiety, you also need to be aware of another potential danger. Anxious teens sometimes "self-medicate" with alcohol or marijuana. So be on the alert for signs that he is using drugs or alcohol.



## Are you helping your struggling teen?

December is often when teens sometimes find themselves struggling in one class—or in several. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're doing all you can to help your teen get caught up:

\_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about her progress in school?

\_\_\_ **2. Have you and your teen met** with her teachers to develop a plan for getting her back on track?

\_\_\_ **3. Have you encouraged** your teen to sign up for school activities? Teens who feel connected to school are more likely to be successful.

\_\_\_ **4. Are you helping** your teen develop study skills—such as setting a regular study time or learning how to take notes?

\_\_\_ **5. Are you working** to get your teen study support, such as a tutor?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you are doing what it takes to get your struggling teen back on track. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Problems are not stop signs—they are guidelines."*

—Robert Schuller

## Good reasons to read can cancel your teen's excuses

Your teen spends hours on the computer or texting, but you can't remember when you last saw her pick up an actual book. And when you ask her about reading, she gives you a bored look or trots out a tired excuse.

Next time, be ready. You can't force your teen to read, but you can let her know excuses won't work. If your teen says, "Why should I read," you can answer:

- **"Strong reading skills** will help your schoolwork."
- **"Reading is a thrill!** A book can take you anywhere."
- **"Books offer free advice** from characters facing many teen problems."

Source: "Teens and Reading," Reading Is Fundamental, [www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/articles/teenagers-and-reading.htm](http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/articles/teenagers-and-reading.htm).

## Beef up your listening skills

How do you respond when your teen shares a problem? Do you jump to the rescue with solutions and ideas? Do you interrupt to question his story? Either way, you're not really listening. Let him finish. You may discover that your teen wasn't asking for advice after all—he was telling you about how he solved a problem on his own.

## Emphasize value of learning

"Why do I have to learn this anyway?" Give your teen a chance to see how the things she learns in school will be useful later in life. If possible, set up a visit with a person in a job she would like to have someday. When she sees that her classes open the door to many careers, she will be more motivated to stick with them.



### Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: Pat Hodgdon. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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

Copyright © 2011, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

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

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-103x