

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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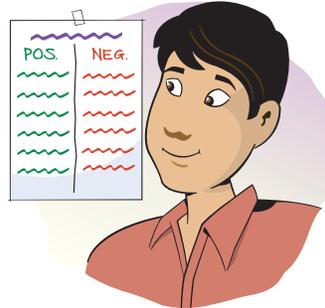
Educational Service Unit 10

Six small steps add up to strong decision-making skills

Often, the best way to teach a new skill is to break it down into several steps, then have the student practice each one until the skill is mastered. This approach works for teaching teens how to make decisions, too.

Encourage your teen to practice these steps:

- 1. Discuss the issue.** What does he already know about what he needs to decide?
- 2. Gather information.** Suggest that your teen find out as much as he can about the situation before making a choice.
- 3. List the options.** Remind your teen that not all decisions are simple either/or choices. There may be several alternatives.
- 4. Think about consequences.** Your teen can draw a line down a piece of paper, then write one choice at the top. He should list the positive consequences of that option on one side of the line and the negative consequences on the other. Have him do this for each possible choice.
- 5. Consider feelings and values.** Sometimes, the best decision on paper may not *feel* right. Your teen needs to consider your family's values.
- 6. Choose the best possible course of action.** Although it's hard for a parent to let go, this is the most important step to turn over to your teen. If he makes a wise choice, be sure to praise him. If he makes a poor choice, help him see how he can make a better one in the future.



Source: E. Welker, "Decision Making/Problem Solving With Teens," The Ohio State University Extension, nswc.com/decision.



Strategies your teen can put to the test

Testing is a fact of life for high school students. While some tests have more of an impact on your teen's academic success than others, she should take them all seriously. Share these test-taking strategies with your teen:

- Read the directions** carefully. Your teen may be asked to choose more than one answer, or to show her work. Reading the directions will keep her from making simple and avoidable mistakes.
- Use time wisely.** Whenever possible, your teen should read through the entire test before answering any questions, then budget her time. She should use all the time available. Some teens
- treat tests like a race—they want to be first across the finish line. Your teen should use any extra time to check her work.
- Answer the easy ones first.** This can give your teen the confidence to tackle tougher questions. It may also remind her of a fact that she'll need in order to answer a more challenging question.

Source: J.G. Thompson, *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide*, Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Uphold academic honesty

Many teens think cheating is normal. To make it clear to yours that cheating is not OK:

- **Let him know** that copying answers, or trying to pass off material from a book or the Internet as his own, is stealing.
- **Don't do his work for him.**
- **Encourage him to be proud** when he accomplishes things on his own.

Source: T. Walker, "What Can Be Done About Student Cheating?" National Education Association, nswc.com/cheat.

Write a letter to the future

Here's a fun project to remind your teen that her efforts in school affect her future. Have her write a letter that explains her goals and completes these statements:

- **When I graduate,**
I want to be known as the student who ...
- **After high school,**
I hope to ...
- **So in high school,**
I'll have to do well in ...



Save the letter to open on graduation day!

Source: E. Wissner-Gross, *What High Schools Don't Tell You (and Other Parents Don't Want You to Know)*, Plume.

What to read? Try these!

Suggest that your teen look for something exciting to read by browsing some of these websites:



- **BookLoons** (www.bookloons.com) has a section for teens with book reviews, excerpts and author interviews.
- **Teenreads** (www.teenreads.com) has an "Ultimate Reading List" of more than 400 titles your teen might enjoy.
- **Librarypoint** (<http://teens.librarypoint.org>) includes student-chosen "Top Picks."
- **Goodreads** (www.goodreads.com) lets teens keep track of what they've read.



Will playing sports help or hurt my teen's schoolwork?

Q: My daughter's grades have never been very good, and this year (her first in high school) is no exception. She wants to try out for a sports team. Should I make her sit out this season until her grades improve, or should I let her try out?

A: For some students, sports take up needed study time. But for others, athletics may actually help them do better in school. The key, as always, is balance. Most teens who spend less than 20 hours per week on an activity or sport can also be good students. Playing a sport can help teens:

- **Learn time management.** Athletes have less time to spend watching TV or goofing around with their friends.
- **Set higher goals** for themselves. Athletes often plan to go to college. Spending time with students who are aiming high may inspire your teen to set her own sights a bit higher.



To make the right decision for your teen:

- **Talk to the coach** and share your concerns about your teen's grades. Find out what the academic requirements are for athletes.
- **Ask the coach** to tell your teen about the grades and test scores she'll need if she wants to keep playing sports in high school.
- **Establish clear expectations** for success. Most teen athletes will rise to the challenge.



Are you planning for after-school hours?

Teens spend twice as much time out of the classroom as in it. And those who use their after-school hours wisely tend to do better in school. Are you helping your teen make the most of his time out of school? Answer *yes* or *no*:

___ **1. Do you know** where your teen goes after school?

___ **2. Do you ask** your teen to check in with you when he gets home from school if you are at work?

___ **3. Have you encouraged** your teen to join a school club or sports team? Research shows that teens who do more than just study are more successful after high school.

___ **4. Have you set** a regular study time? Do you check to see that homework is finished?

___ **5. Do you limit** your teen's TV and other screen time?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're helping your teen use non-school time wisely. For each no, try that idea.

“Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”

—Malcolm Forbes

Community service rewards

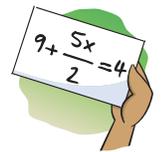
When your teen volunteers in the community, she contributes to society—and to her own future. Volunteer work can help teens identify career interests and build workplace skills. And studies show that teens who volunteer as little as two hours a week are 50 percent less likely to smoke, drink or do drugs. Check the library or community center for opportunities.

Source: A.P. Murphy, “Teens Who Volunteer Reap Academic Rewards,” ABC News, nswc.com/service.

Try memory aids that work

Memory skills, especially long-term memory skills, are critical for learning. To boost your teen's memory power, have him:

- **Look at the big picture.** When studying a chapter, your teen should also look at the summaries of the chapters around it. That will help him understand how the one he's reading relates to the whole unit.
- **Use flash cards.** Frequent review with this tried-and-true method really does make remembering facts easier.
- **Review and then sleep.** While your teen's body is getting much needed rest, his brain will be working on retaining the material he studied just before bedtime.



Source: E. Jensen, *Student Success Secrets*, Barron's Educational Series.

Build on the bright side

School success is built on many skills, both academic and social. And a critical foundation for all of them is a positive attitude. To encourage positivity, help your teen:

- **Be hopeful.** Teach her to focus each day on what went right, and to make that the starting point for the next day.
- **Avoid comparing** herself to others.
- **Move on** after disappointments. Encourage her to look in a new direction.

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