

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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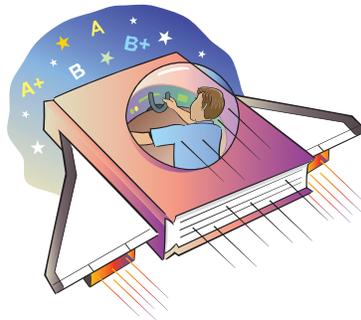
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Educational Service Unit 10

Build the traits that rocket teens toward success in school

Kindness. Thoughtfulness. Generosity. All are great attributes to have. But for success in school, research points to the importance of seven traits: zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism and curiosity. Students with these qualities are more likely than others to keep trying after setbacks. In fact, they are more likely to do better in school than students who are smart but not as driven. To help your teen build:

- **Zest**, show enthusiasm for what your teen is learning. "Wow! Zebrafish can regrow their fins? That's really interesting!"
- **Grit**, praise your teen's perseverance. "I'm proud of the way you stuck with that difficult geometry homework until you understood it."
- **Self-control**, give your teen responsibilities. If he can complete tasks at home without reminders, he'll be able to direct himself at school.
- **Social intelligence**, suggest that your teen put himself in others' shoes. "Why do you think Katniss helped Peeta?"
- **Gratitude**, go beyond just making sure your teen says thank you. Discuss why he feels grateful.
- **Optimism**, encourage your teen to look at the bright side of events.
- **Curiosity**, help your teen explore more about what he is learning. Head to the library or research information online.



Source: P. Tough, "What if the Secret to Success Is Failure?" *The New York Times*, <http://tinyurl.com/lryjhhz>.



Understand the 'why' of poor grades

He got a bad grade—no, a terrible grade—in Spanish last marking period. What should you do? Perhaps the most useful thing you can do is to help him "own" it. Here are some big questions he should consider:

- **Did he invest** the time he needed? How much time did he actually spend on his Spanish? Did he review the new vocabulary he learned in class? Did he turn in his homework? He is responsible for how he uses his time.
- **Does he know** how to study? Sometimes, teens think that if they just skim the chapter, they have "studied." He needs to learn that studying is an active process. If he doesn't know how, look on the Internet for college study sites. Or ask his teacher for specific study suggestions.
- **Did he assume** he is just "not smart" in the class? Nearly any subject can be learned with effort.

Source: J.B. Bader, *Dean's List: 11 Habits of Highly Successful College Students*, Johns Hopkins University Press.

Boost word skills for SATs

There are over 300,000 words in the English language. It's no wonder the SAT test can be so hard to prepare for. Your teen can boost her vocabulary if she will:

- **Study flash cards** of common SAT words for 10 minutes a day.
- **Read**. She'll learn new words, and how they are used correctly.
- **Go online**. Try: <http://testyourvocab.com>. Then try it again in a couple of months.



Stop nagging and motivate

When he's working on something he wants to do, your teen can be highly motivated. So why do you have to keep telling him to finish his lab report? One reason is that to teens, "telling" sounds a lot like "nagging."

To motivate him, acknowledge that there is probably a reason he's avoiding the task. Then ask, "What will happen if you keep putting it off?" Help him set a schedule. You might say, "How long did the lab report take you last time? Maybe 20 minutes won't be enough."



Source: J. Nelsen, "How Do You Motivate a Teen," *Positive Discipline*, <http://tinyurl.com/mlc2gzt>.

Help combat peer pressure

Peer pressure can hurt—as when teens convince another teen to drink. It can also be harmless—or even helpful. To teach your child to know the difference:

- **Talk about issues** like drugs, sex and dating. Make sure she knows your values.
- **Banish bullying**. Explain that bullying is never okay. And if she thinks someone could get hurt, she must tell an adult.
- **Ask her opinion**, and listen. She'll learn to think for herself.

Source: M. Hardcastle, "Beating Peer Pressure," <http://tinyurl.com/3kxk3>.



What if my child won't eat?



Q: My daughter loves cheerleading. But she has put on weight (mostly muscle) and is afraid she won't make the team next year. I worry she is starting to develop an eating disorder. She avoids eating with the family when she can, leaves the table early and puts in extra workouts. Should I say something to her?

A: Anxiety about weight and body image could distract your daughter from her studies, affecting her grades as well as her health. On top of society's pressure on women to be thin, a lot of the attention cheerleaders get focuses on how they look. It is no surprise that studies of college-level cheerleaders have found them to be at higher risk for eating disorders. You should:

- **Talk with your daughter.** Instead of focusing on her eating, talk about staying healthy. Focus on what you've seen. Don't say, "I think you have an eating disorder." Say, "I am concerned that you are spending so much time working out."
- **Talk with her coach.** Coaches want their athletes to be healthy, and need to be informed about health issues. Discuss the behavior you have seen at home. Ask the coach for help in promoting the idea of a healthy body weight.
- **Get medical help** if you see the behavior continuing. If your daughter resists, tell her you simply want to put your mind at ease. Eating disorders are serious. Left untreated, they can lead to serious health problems or even death.



Parent Quiz

Who is to blame for arguments between you and your teen?

Teens and parents don't always see eye to eye. It's natural for parents to think disagreements are their teen's fault. But before you lay the blame at your teen's feet, ask yourself these questions:

1. **Do you avoid** bringing up past problems when you are discussing a current issue?
2. **Do you stay** on track when your teen tries to change the subject by criticizing you?
3. **Do you acknowledge** that you may remember something you said differently if you and your teen disagree about it?
4. **Do you recognize** the point at which your teen starts to feel under attack and stop the conversation to wait until you are both calmer?
5. **Do you make a real effort** to understand your teen's side of the argument?

How did you do?

Each yes means you are doing your best to talk openly and fairly about disagreements with your teen. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"If you're doing your best, you won't have any time to worry about failure."

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Attend to attendance

Many teens think skipping class isn't a big deal. But studies show that students who skip class often fall behind, lose motivation, feel disconnected from school and are more likely to consider dropping out. Insist your teen go to every class, every day. Be sure to:

- **Talk about why** attendance is critical.
- **Contact the teacher** if you suspect your child may be skipping class.

Source: E. Yazzie-Mintz, "Students are bored, many skip school," IU News Room, <http://tinyurl.com/colg3z>.

Talk, listen and stay involved

Staying involved with your teen's schooling may be harder in high school than it was in elementary school. Your child may not tell you what is going on, and you may not understand some of his coursework.

Try asking him what interests him most—are there careers to explore in that subject? Asking "isn't your pre-calculus test tomorrow?" shows him you are paying attention. Let him know you expect him to do his best.

Support your teen's emerging executive skills

She constantly hands in assignments late—if at all. She dawdles until she is out of time. Then she rushes and hands in sloppy work.

Your teen may not lack motivation. Instead, she may be missing "executive skills." These planning and organizing skills are among the last to develop. Have her:



- **Make checklists.** Help her think about each step to take.
- **Minimize clutter.** Have her schedule a weekly time to clean her work space.
- **Use visual reminders.** Have her post a big calendar—and use it.

Source: P. Dawson, "Lazy—Or Not?" *Educational Leadership*, October 2010, ASCD.

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