

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

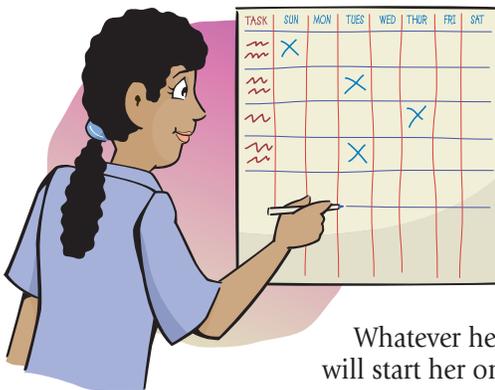


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## Charts can help teens reach goals

Celebrating the New Year can be fun. But once the party hats and streamers are put away, take time to review your teen's goals for the school year.



Your teen's resolutions may include:

- **Making** the honor roll.
- **Getting** a spot on the softball team.
- **Improving** her attendance by going to school every day.
- **Raising** her history grade.

Whatever her goals are, writing them down will start her on the road to success.

Have your teen come up with daily tasks that will help her reach each goal—reviewing vocabulary, working out, getting up half an hour earlier or studying for an extra 20 minutes each day. Then have her create a chart with the days of the week across the top and the tasks down the left side. She can then check off each completed task.

The chart will serve as a visual reminder both of what she still has left to do and all that she has already accomplished. And seeing everything she's done mapped out in front of her might give her an extra push on days when her motivation seems to be missing.

Identifying the steps to help her achieve a goal and putting them on a chart can work for long-range projects, the college application process or getting a job, too. It's a self-motivation skill that will help your child not just in 2011 but in the years to come.



## Help your teen jump start his writing

An attention-grabbing opening is one way your teen can improve his writing. To write a strong "lead," have him use:

- **An interesting fact.** Which report would you rather read? One that begins, "This is a report about the human blood system"? Or, "There are 60,000 miles of blood vessels in the human body."
- **An interesting story.** Have your teen think of an anecdote that illustrates the point he is

making. Readers are always engaged by human interest accounts.

- **A quotation.** He can find one in a book he has used for research, from an online source or from a book of quotations.

You teen may find that it works to write the body of his composition first and compose the introduction as one of his last steps.

Source: Tim Clifford, *The Middle School Writing Toolkit: Differentiated Instruction Across the Content Areas*, ISBN: 0-92989-575-4, Maupin House.

## Apply for financial aid now

If your senior is heading for college, it's time to apply for financial aid. Your teen's school counselor can help your family fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To do this, you'll need your 2010 income tax return, so plan to file early this year. For online information, go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

## Regular attendance is linked to graduation rates

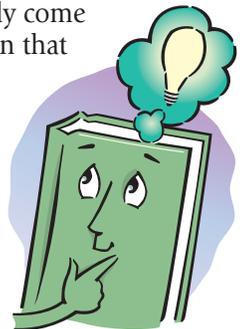
A recent study found that 90 percent of ninth-grade students who missed fewer than four days of school each semester graduated on time. Only 63 percent of students who missed five to nine days graduated. As the number of absences increased, the graduation rates went down. If you look forward to seeing your ninth-grader in a cap and gown, send him to school today.



Source: E. M. Allensworth and J. Q. Easton, "What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools," Consortium on Chicago School Research, [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub\\_id=116](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=116).

## When parents step back, teens are able to step up

When parents constantly come to the rescue, teens learn that they don't have to try. So the next time your teen struggles with a school project or a problem with friends, give her some space. Once she knows you aren't going to step in, she's likely to figure it out on her own.



Source: Diane Heacox, *Up from Underachievement: How Teachers, Students, and Parents Can Work Together to Promote Student Success*, ISBN: 0-91579-335-0, Free Spirit Publishing.



## How can parents put a limit on electronic distractions?

**Q:** My son listens to music and sends text messages while he's doing homework. He endlessly surfs the Internet. I've tried to talk with him about it, but he says it's not a problem. I'm concerned because his grades are down. What can I do?

**A:** You are not the only parent who is having this conversation. With all the gadgets available today, teens can easily be distracted. And this multi-tasking can cause problems. Multi-tasking teens often:

- **Can't complete** assignments on time.
- **Can't remember** what they have studied.
- **Can't focus** when three or four things are competing for attention.

To keep distractions to a minimum:

- **Say** your teen can listen to quiet music.
- **Take away** his cell phone during homework time.
- **Turn off** the TV while he's studying.
- **Monitor** his computer use. It may help to put the computer in a spot where you can see what your teen is doing.



Tell your teen that you can relax these restrictions when his grades improve. If you don't see progress, talk with his teachers. Ask what other strategies you can use to motivate your son at home.



## Who is filling out those applications?

There's no question that it's harder to apply to college today. But that doesn't mean you should take over for your teen. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're too involved as your teen applies to college:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** a first-choice college for your teen? Would you be *very* disappointed if she didn't get accepted and go there?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make** statements like, "We're applying to five in-state schools," instead of "She is applying ... "?
- \_\_\_ **3. Have you set** appointments with the school counselor without your teen?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you plan** to write—or rewrite—your teen's essays? Will you fill out applications for her?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you plan** to stay in the room with your teen during college interviews?

**How did you do?** *Each yes answer means you are overly involved with some aspect of your teen's college search. It's time to back off and let her take over.*

*"The best helping hand that you will ever receive is the one at the end of your own arm."*

—Fred Dehner

## Keep communication open

Teens like to test boundaries. Often teens' impolite answers are their way of seeing just how much they can get away with. Teens also assert their independence through pretending their parents' opinions don't matter. But your teen still needs you—so keep talking. Teens who have close relationships with parents are more likely to maintain those close relationships through adulthood.

Source: "Talking and Listening to Youth Fact Sheet," Tennessee Department of Health, [http://health.state.tn.us/MCH/Adolescent/Talking\\_with\\_Youth\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://health.state.tn.us/MCH/Adolescent/Talking_with_Youth_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

## Know what to do when you can't help with math

Sooner or later, most parents face math homework that they don't understand. So how do you help your teen when you don't understand her homework? Ask her:

- **What** do the directions say? What words do you not understand?
- **What** problems like this one have you done before?
- **Can** you go in before or after school for help from your teacher?

## Don't tolerate teen drinking

Alcohol use leads to many teenage problems. Students who drink are more likely to:

- **Engage** in impulsive, sometimes dangerous, behavior.
- **Be involved** in auto accidents. One-fourth of the teens killed in car crashes were intoxicated.



Establish a "no alcohol" policy. Know where your teen is going and who he'll be with.

Source: "Another link between death and drinking," American Psychological Association, [www.apa.org/monitor/feb04/another.aspx](http://www.apa.org/monitor/feb04/another.aspx).

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