

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Educational Service Unit 10

Boost your teen's study skills with five easy organizing ideas

Your teen can't do her math homework if she can't find the assignment or her math book. She can't turn in her essay if she left it sitting on the kitchen table at home. That's why helping your teen get organized is a great way to help her earn better grades.

Encourage your teen to try these five ideas:

- 1. Keep study materials together.** If she doesn't study at a desk, your teen can use a box to corral all the supplies she needs. That way, she won't spend 15 minutes looking for graph paper.
- 2. Post a large calendar** near the space where she studies. On it, she should write each deadline. It helps to use a different color for every class. Before each study session, she should check the calendar to see what's due next.
- 3. Break large projects down into small steps.** Rather than having just one deadline, she should assign and write deadlines on the calendar for each part of the project—finding source material, writing an outline, completing the first draft, finishing final revisions.
- 4. Use small chunks of time.** Ten minutes is enough time to review vocabulary words or do a sample math problem from the textbook.
- 5. Wrap up homework sessions** by putting everything that should go to school into her backpack by the door.



Source: G. Wood, *How to Study*, LearningExpress.



Discipline gives teen brains room to grow

He may have matured physically, but the part of your teen's brain that controls impulses and helps him make good decisions is not yet mature. Teaching your teen self-discipline will pay off both in school and at home. Here are some guidelines:

- **Expect difficult moments.** When your teen acts first and thinks later, it is not necessarily because he wants to hurt you.
- **Be firm, yet flexible.** Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking them. Consider granting him more freedom as he shows he can handle more responsibility.
- **Don't excuse bad behavior.** Age and brain growth may explain your teen's actions. They don't excuse defiance.
- **Focus on the big issues,** such as schoolwork and respect for others. Try not to nag about things such as an occasional messy room.

Source: D. Walsh, *Why Do They Act That Way?* Free Press.

Effort is the key to success

Teens often think the ability to succeed is something people are born with. Show your teen that what really matters is *effort*.

Encourage her to spend time developing her strengths. Praise her hard work. Focus on effort more than grades—it's normal for your teen to be better at some subjects than at others.

Teach three tech lessons

Teens text around 60 times a day. But your teen shouldn't pay more attention to his phone than to his responsibilities. Help him learn three lessons:

- 1. Texting and homework don't mix.** A teen who is distracted by texts may spend more time on homework—with less to show for it.
- 2. Smart phone cheating is dumb.** It's still cheating, even if it's high-tech.
- 3. You check his messages.** He should keep your reaction in mind when he texts.



Source: "Teens, Smartphones & Texting," Pew Internet, niswc.com/3lessons.

This trick makes facts stick

A mnemonic (nuh-MAHN-ic) device is a trick to help remember something. Create fun mnemonics with your teen using these methods:



- **Acronyms.** Make a word from the first letters of items in a list (HOMES stands for the names of the Great Lakes).
- **Rhymes.** "Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety-two."
- **Music.** Have her set key facts to a pop song—she'll never get it out of her head.
- **Chunking.** Combine longer lists of items into smaller groups.

Source: M.K. Ruben, *How to Tutor Your Own Child*, Ten Speed Press.



How do I help my teen deal with teasing about his size?

Q: My son is a big kid. The other kids at his school are teasing him. He says no one will sit with him on the bus because he's too fat. He has been skipping gym class because of locker room teasing, and he doesn't want to go to school. What can I do?

A: What's happening to your son is bullying and he doesn't deserve it. Sadly, he isn't the only student dealing with bullying about his appearance. Studies show that overweight students are often taunted by other students. To help your teen overcome this situation:

- **Give him your support.** Sometimes, kids who are the victims of bullying start to feel that it's their fault. Let him know it's not!
- **Let the school know what is happening.** Your son should tell the gym teacher the reason he's cutting class. The teacher needs to know what is going on in the locker room so he can stop it. You may also want to tell the principal or the school counselor.
- **Focus his attention on things he's good at.** Find ways for your son to spend more time on these activities. He'll feel a sense of accomplishment and he may also meet kids who share his interests.
- **Work with him on healthy living.** Ask his doctor for appropriate goals. Make physical activity and nutrition a priority for your whole family.



Do you take a stand against cheating?

Cheating causes problems for all students. Yet in one survey, more than half of high school students admitted to cheating in the previous year. Are you communicating your values about cheating to your teen? Answer *yes* or *no*:

- ___ **1. Do you set** a good example of honesty?
- ___ **2. Do you use** situations on TV shows to begin a conversation about the problems with a win-at-all-costs mentality?
- ___ **3. Do you focus** on effort, rather than grades, so your teen won't feel she has to cheat?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** with your teen about how to be honest in difficult situations?
- ___ **5. Does your teen know** that if she's caught cheating, she'll face serious consequences?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen develop a code of ethics that discourages cheating. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Success is not final.
Failure is not fatal. It is
the courage to continue
that counts."*

—Winston Churchill

Write by the numbers: five steps to better papers

No matter the subject, following these steps helps teens improve writing assignments:

- 1. Plan.** Brainstorm a list of key points.
- 2. Research** beyond the textbook. A thorough understanding gives writing depth.
- 3. Make an outline.** Many teens hate this step—but it works.
- 4. Write** several drafts. Reviewing each draft after a break sparks ideas for revisions.
- 5. Proofread.**

Source: J. Under and S. Fleischman, "Is Process Writing the 'Write Stuff'?" *Educational Leadership*.

Relieve math worries

Does high school math make your teen nervous? *It can* be very challenging, but with solid study skills and the right attitude, she can rise to the challenge. Offer her these tips:

- **Don't delay** doing math homework.
- **Ask for help.** Relax by thinking "I don't understand this now, but I'm going to ask for help when class is over."
- **Go to every class!**

Students need self-respect

Respecting others begins with respecting oneself. Talk with your teen about the qualities of self-respect:

- **Acceptance** of his strengths and weaknesses.
- **Self-value**—taking care of his body.
- **Vision**—keeping future goals in mind.
- **Understanding** that others have value.
- **Desire to learn.**



Which qualities does he already possess? Develop a plan for working on the others.

Source: B. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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