

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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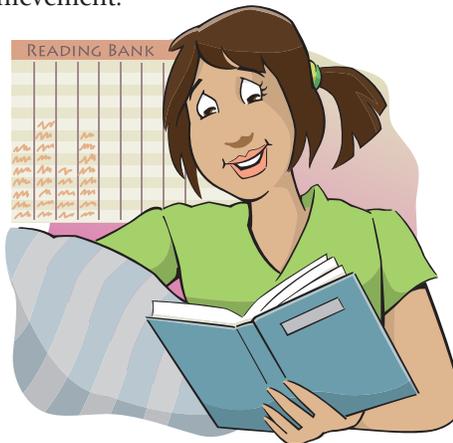
Educational Service Unit 10

'Fun reading' boosts literacy skills

Reading is a key element in student achievement.

Now that your child is in high school, she is expected to read more difficult and sophisticated material, perhaps every night. And a great way to get ready for this heavier workload of "serious" reading is for your teen to read things that are fun.

The more she reads—no matter what it is—the better and faster she will read, and the more she will remember and understand. Here are some ways to try to get your teen to do more reading:



- **Get the family involved.** Pick a time, perhaps on Sunday evening, when each family member is usually home. Make a favorite dessert or snack. Then have a family reading hour.
- **Talk with your teen** about some of her favorite things. Then head to the library. Encourage her to check out some books and magazines about these interests.
- **Give your teen an incentive to read.** Some families have a system where children must put in a certain amount of reading time if they want to have TV, telephone or computer time. It's worth a try!
- **Ask your teen to read about movies** she wants to see. If a movie is based on a book, she should read the book. If not, challenge her to read all reviews of that movie she can find. Let her use the information in the reviews to convince you to allow her to see the movie.

Source: J. Trelease, *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, Penguin.



Stay involved by asking questions

Research shows that parent involvement promotes student success. To keep up with your teen's academic progress, ask him some questions:

- **What is he learning?** Does he think his class work will help him meet his goals for the future?
- **How can he get help** if he's struggling in a class? Does he have time to bring a grade up before the end of the marking period?
- **Is he enjoying** his activities? Does he have time to study and relax?
- **Are things going well** with friends? Are concerns about his friends interfering with his schoolwork?
- **Does he need your help** in any way? Let your teen know you believe in him, and want to help him reach his goals.

Source: P. Benson, J. Galbraith and P. Espeland, *What Teens Need to Succeed*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Discuss respectful traits

To promote respectful behavior, talk with your teen about the qualities of respectful people. Respectful people:

- **Treat** people, other living things, property and the environment with care.
- **Listen** to the ideas and opinions of others, even if they don't agree.
- **Avoid** hurting others' feelings.

Source: "A Person of Character: Respect," Character Counts! www.charactercounts.org/pdf/PersonOfCharacter-handout-0703.pdf.

Confer before a conference

If you are asked to attend a parent-teacher conference, make sure you keep your teen in the loop. Before talking with teachers, talk with your child calmly about each grade. Ask if he knows why he got each grade. Ask what he thinks needs to be done. This process returns ownership of the results to your teen, while still showing teachers that you are concerned.



Teens can be superheroes!

As a child, your teen probably loved stories where a superhero saves the day. But in real life, hard work and perseverance make the difference when your teen is faced with a difficult challenge. To send this message to your teen:

- **Find** books about characters whose efforts helped them overcome obstacles and succeed in life.
- **Share** newspaper articles about people who have persevered in spite of the odds.
- **Comment** positively when your teen's hard work results in success.





What should parents do if their child is drinking?

Q: My son has begun hanging out with some older students and I suspect they drink. His grades are dropping and he doesn't want to go to school in the morning. How can I tell if my son has a drinking problem?

A: Your instincts are probably right. The description of your son includes many of the warning signs that he may in fact have a problem with alcohol. Here are some things you can do:

- **Tell your son** clearly that he may not use alcohol.
- **Help him see** that abusing alcohol could prevent him from achieving goals such as getting into college or getting a good job.
- **Supervise him** more closely. Insist that he tell you where he's going and who he'll be with.
- **Don't be afraid** to tell him he can't associate with certain kids. Keeping your son away from a bad influence could get him back on the right track.
- **Ask teachers** to call you at work (so you are sure to get the message) if he skips class.
- **Arrange for your son** to be in an activity or to have someone with him during the hours after school when you are not home.



Are you helping your teen get focused?

Teens today face all sorts of distractions. They try to send text messages to their friends and listen to music—while studying for history. Answer these questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your teen concentrate:

1. **Do you enforce** times when electronic distractions (like Facebook and text messaging) must be turned off, like during family dinners and study time?
2. **Do you try** to provide as much structure as possible in your home life?
3. **Do you help** your teen think about consequences before she acts?
4. **Do you encourage** your teen to ask for a seat in the front of the class so it's easier to block out distractions from other students?

5. **Do you help** your teen find ways to keep track of school priorities?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're helping your teen stay focused on what's really important. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Focus is a matter of deciding what things you're not going to do."
—John Carmack

Encourage volunteering

To build your teen's character, suggest that she take some time to volunteer. Teens who volunteer regularly:

- **Are less likely** to use drugs or have unprotected sex.
- **Are developing** a strong work ethic.
- **Are more likely** to be active participants in their communities as adults.
- **Are gaining** skills that can be listed on résumés or college applications.

Source: J. Littlefield, "Teen Volunteerism: How to Promote a Positive Volunteer Experience," About.com: Teens, http://parentingteens.about.com/od/youthorganizations/a/teen_volunteer3.htm.

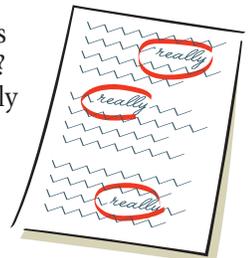
One word works wonders

Do you find yourself nagging your teen? Remember, teens have short attention spans. So when you want to get your teen's attention, use one word. Say "dishes," or "homework." Your teen will get the message and you'll avoid having to nag.

Share editing techniques

Teens don't always know what to look for when they're editing their own writing. Share these tips:

- **Read it aloud.** Does the paper make sense? Does it move smoothly from one idea to the next?
- **Check for over-used words.** Did your teen use "really" in five of six paragraphs? Constantly using the same words makes writing boring.
- **Proofread.** After all other editing is complete, read the paper carefully one more time. Check for misspelled words. (Spell check won't catch everything.)



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