

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Teach your teen that persistence pays off with success

It isn't easy for students to power through and complete tough assignments. But giving up won't get your teen very far in school or outside it. Life is full of difficult jobs and tasks, so learning persistence now will also pay off in the future.

When your teen learns to be persistent, big projects will seem less daunting—and her grades will probably improve. To motivate your teen as she works through challenging projects:



- **Notice her progress.** Say, "You're really coming along on that."
- **Urge your teen to cheer herself on.** Positive self-talk, such as, "I am going to do this," can keep her going through the most difficult tasks.
- **Offer support.** If your teen is struggling to complete something, a little help may motivate her to stick with it. You might read what she's written so far, suggest a source she could review, or gather supplies.
- **Be a role model.** If you've been putting off a big chore, decide to do it. Say, "I am going to work until I get this finished." Then keep your word.
- **Treat her to something special** when she finishes. Watch a movie together or cook a favorite dinner. Your teen showed persistence through a tough task—she deserves to celebrate!

Source: M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.



Achievement depends on attendance

Your teen can't get the most out of this school year if he isn't in his classes. Classwork and participation are key parts of high school courses.

Your teen is responsible for being present. Help him by emphasizing that school attendance is a priority for your family. You should:

- **Make sure he knows** that he must be in school unless he is ill or there is a family emergency.
- **Avoid making appointments** for your teen during school hours, when possible.
- **Avoid having your teen** babysit during the school day.

If you discover your teen has skipped school, you should:

- **Emphasize** that he has broken a rule at home as well as at school.
- **Support** the consequences given by his teachers and the school.
- **Revoke** a privilege or assign work at home. If he skips school, he can skip his weekend plans, too.

Source: R.S. Sprick, *Discipline in the Secondary Classroom: A Problem-by-Problem Survival Guide*, The Center for Applied Research in Education.

Turn health into a habit

Healthy routines will keep your teen learning her best this year. Encourage her to commit to these things daily:



- **Breakfast.** Think healthy and portable.
- **Exercise.** It recharges her brain before homework time.
- **A good night's sleep.**

Expect great things—and you may just get them

Research shows that parents' expectations affect their teens' school performance. Maintain high (but realistic) standards. To help your teen achieve them:

1. **Talk about what he will do** after graduation. Help him create a clear picture of where he's going—and what it takes to get there.
2. **Focus on improving work habits**, rather than just grades. Talk with your teen about the things he *can* control.
3. **Stay in touch with the school.** Let your teen know you and the teachers are a team working to help him do his best.

Encourage regular reading

High school students have a lot to read—and it doesn't stop after graduation. Your teen must maintain strong reading skills to succeed in college or the workplace. To underline the importance of reading:



- **Read what your teen reads.** It's a good way to start conversations with her.
- **Build on her interests.** Help her find books and articles on whatever excites her, from astronomy to zumba.
- **Value all reading.** Comics and other fun reading materials build skills, too.

Source: "Teenagers and Reading," Reading is Fundamental, niscw.com/value.



How do I find out what's up with my teen?

Q: My son would make a great secret agent. If he doesn't want you to know something, he won't talk. Last year he kept it secret that he was in danger of failing math until it was almost too late to do anything. How can I get him to tell me things that really are important?

A: You can't help your teen solve problems unless you are aware of them. But many teens share only on a need-to-know basis. And as you learned last year, they don't always have the best judgment about what you need to know. So as the school year starts, you need to improve communication with your son—and with the school. Interestingly, the solution may be to get your son talking about things that are not so important. To get him to open up:

- **Shift the focus.** Ask his advice. Involve him in a project. When the two of you are focused on some other task, talk may come more easily.
- **Talk about everyday things.**
- **Talk with him, not at him.** Try to do as much listening as talking.
- **Let him take the lead.** If he wants to talk football, talk football.

Meanwhile, stay in contact with the school. Tell his teachers how to reach you. Let your son know you will be in touch with his teachers. He may never be a chatterbox. But you can learn what you need to know.



Can your teen handle a part-time job?

Your teen is desperate to earn some spending money. You don't know whether or not she is up to the responsibility of a part-time job. To find out if she's ready, answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Does your teen get** herself up and to school on time almost every morning?
- ___ **2. Does your teen usually** make good decisions? Do you trust her to choose good friends?
- ___ **3. Does your teen take** responsibility for her mistakes and try to do better?
- ___ **4. Does your teen complete** her schoolwork every day without your nagging?
- ___ **5. Does your teen stick** with projects until they are finished?

How is your teen doing?

Each yes means your teen is a little closer to accepting the responsibility of a part-time job. If you answered no several times, you may want to wait until she is a little more mature.

“Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.”
—Confucius

Meet teen frustrations with firmness and respect

Your teen is becoming more his own person, independent from you. It may seem he's rebelling, but he needs to know that you support and respect him, even when he's challenging you. The next time you are at odds:

- **Keep conversation calm.** Discuss how you each feel.
- **Ask the right questions.** *What* and *how* questions help your teen understand the consequences of his actions. *Why* questions often lead to defensiveness.
- **Find a common bond.** Share how you solved a similar issue.
- **Remind him that you love him.**

Source: M.R. Miller, “Kind and Firm Parenting for Parents of Teens,” Positive Discipline Association, niswc.com/odds.

Add in extra ‘math minutes’

A little more time spent at the end of a homework session may help your teen improve her math grade. Have her ask herself:

- **Is there another way** to solve the problems I just finished?
- **If I close my book,** can I summarize what I learned?
- **How does what I** learned today relate to what I knew before?



Source: “Studying for Math and Science,” Albion College Study Skills.

Delete digital distractions

You want your teen to get his schoolwork done on time. But you don't want to look over his shoulder constantly.

Try eliminating technological distractions. Have your teen turn off the computer and put his cell phone in another room while he does work that doesn't need the Internet.

Source: A. Homayoun, *That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week: Helping Disorganized and Distracted Boys Succeed in School and Life*, Perigee Books.

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