

High School Parents[®]

September 2020
Vol. 28, No. 1

Enterprise City Schools
Parent & Family Engagement

still make the difference!



Start the new school year with a focus on mental health

COVID-19 and last year's school closures disrupted the lives of students and their families across the world. Today's teens are more stressed, anxious, depressed and lonely than ever before.

As your teen begins a new academic year, help her establish habits that will promote her overall well-being. To set her up for success:

- **Give your teen a sense of control.** Allow her to manage her schoolwork and other responsibilities on her own. You can and should still be engaged—just resist the urge to nag.
- **Promote physical health.** Ensure your teen gets enough sleep each night. Remind her to wash her hands regularly and to make time for physical activity every day.
- **Encourage your teen to connect** with teachers, classmates and friends—online or in person. Healthy relationships are essential for teens' mental health and growth.
- **Talk about self-care.** Suggest your teen set aside at least 20 minutes a day for mindful relaxation. She can meditate, do yoga, play with a pet, write in a journal or create art.
- **Recommend your teen** turn off her phone for a few hours each day. Taking a break from notifications, texting and social media can help your teen focus on schoolwork and other activities.
- **Schedule an appointment** with your teen's pediatrician if you become concerned about her emotional or physical health.

Expectations are road maps toward success



Setting high expectations for your teen is a fundamental step toward school success. Think of your expectations like a road map—without the map, there's no guarantee your teen will end up at the final destination (or even know what it is). With the map, he'll be able to successfully find his way.

To ensure that your expectations for your teen are clear:

- **Talk about goals.** Help him make plans for the future and figure out how to make those plans a reality.
- **Discuss the link** between *effort* and *outcome*. Assure your teen that you are prouder when he gives his best effort than when he gets an easy A.
- **Make time to talk** about school and schoolwork. This will help him know that you are interested in his education.
- **Ask him to create routines** for homework and chores. This shows your confidence in his ability to get the "little things" done by himself—and prepares him to tackle larger goals in the future.

Help your high schooler chart a course for graduation and college



Whether your high school student is a freshman or a senior, there are lots of things she can do to make sure she's on track to graduate from high school and move on to college. Here's a partial list:

- **Freshman year**, encourage your teen to get involved in activities that are meaningful to her. Have her tell her school counselor that she plans to go to college. Explore financial aid, scholarships and ways to save for college.
- **Sophomore year**, encourage your teen to research colleges of interest and take virtual tours online. Make sure she is taking challenging classes that meet high school graduation requirements.
- **Junior year**, your teen should take college admissions tests (ACT and/

or SAT). She should make sure that the classes she is taking to meet high school graduation requirements will also meet college admission requirements. Sometimes they differ.

- **Senior year**, your teen should begin her college applications. She should post the dates she needs to submit the applications and financial aid forms. Be sure she fills out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form at fafsa.ed.gov.

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Show your teen how to create a positive online reputation



Teens do most of their communicating on social media. But many don't realize that the choices they make online can affect their future.

Of course, students have the right to free speech. But courts have set limits on what students can say in school settings. And there's a big difference between what students are *allowed* to do and what they *should* do online. Colleges and employers look at students' social media activity and posts.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Check his privacy settings.** All of his posts, even past posts, should be set to private—available only for friends to view.
- **Protect his passwords** so friends can't post on his accounts.

- **Delete inappropriate posts.** While nothing ever completely goes away on the internet, cleaning up social media accounts is a good first step.
- **Focus on creating** a positive reputation. He can share articles and photos about issues he cares about.
- **Follow colleges** he's interested in attending and companies he'd like to work for. If he sees something that interests him, he should comment online and reach out to the school or business.
- **Remember** the most important piece of advice: Always think before you post.

Sources: E. Milovidov, "College-Bound Students: Create a Positive Digital Footprint," Family Online Safety Institute; National Coalition Against Censorship, "Watch What You Tweet: Schools, Censorship, and Social Media."

Are you helping your teen get off to a great start?



"Begin with the end in mind," advises author Stephen Covey. In other words, help your teen start the year using routines that will lead to success all year long.

Are you helping your teen build habits for success this year? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you encouraged** your teen to establish a regular time and place to study that's free from distractions?
- ___ **2. Have you suggested** your teen use tools such as calendars and to-do lists to keep track of assignments and other responsibilities?
- ___ **3. Do you schedule** one-on-one time with your teen? Teens may say time with parents isn't important, but research shows it is.
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to read something for pleasure every day?
- ___ **5. Have you discussed** your family rules with your teen? As he matures, adjust the rules as necessary.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are setting the stage for a successful school year. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1291

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Support your teen's ability to think critically in high school



As high school students get older, they learn to think in more complex ways. Your teen has begun to develop:

- **Advanced reasoning skills.** He is able to think about multiple possibilities and hypothetical situations.
- **Abstract thinking skills.** He can think about intangible concepts, such as *spirituality*.
- **The ability to think about thinking.** This allows your teen to consider *how* he is processing what he is learning and feeling.

Changes in thought processes are often displayed in typical teen behavior, such as the belief that “no one” understands them. Teens also tend to become more concerned

with the world around them. They may start supporting a cause, or begin to notice differences between adults' words and actions.

To support your teen's advancing thinking skills:

- **Listen to his concerns.** Try not to be offended if he says you don't understand. Instead, enlist the help of an older sibling or family friend, and suggest that your teen turn to that person for advice.
- **Listen to his ideas.** Let him give his opinion on family rules and consequences.
- **Discuss his views** of the world—and talk about your own. Ask about his political ideas and spiritual beliefs. Withhold any judgment.
- **Encourage him to get involved** in causes he feels strongly about.

Share these five strategies for successful study sessions



Not all teens know how to study. Those that don't may spend more time than they need to on their work for school. Or they may get frustrated and stop studying completely.

Share these strategies to help your teen study effectively:

1. **Take class notes.** Writing down what the teacher says can help your teen see what the teacher thinks is important. Reviewing her notes regularly will also improve her retention of the material.
2. **Break it up.** Research shows that frequent short study sessions spaced out over time are more effective than one long study session.
3. **Study similar subjects at different times.** Putting new information into

the brain is like pouring concrete. Your teen has to give it time to “set up.” So between a science lesson with a lot of formulas and a math lesson with a lot of formulas, your teen should study history or English—to allow the science lesson time to set.

4. **Avoid getting sidetracked.** If your teen finds her mind wandering during study time, she should keep a notepad by her study spot. She can jot down reminders or random ideas that pop into her head and then get right back to studying.
5. **Eliminate distractions.** The TV, her phone and a growling stomach will all distract your teen. Make sure she turns off all digital devices and takes care of hunger and thirst before sitting down to study.

Q: My daughter's worrying has *me* worried. Before every test, she's sure she will fail. As a result, she does worse than she would if she could relax. She also worries about being popular. So she goes overboard. On a group project last year, she did the work of four people. She is a good student and a nice kid. How can I help her worry a little less?

Questions & Answers

A: The teen years can be tough. But it sounds like your daughter is making things harder than they need to be. Because she's always worrying about the future, she's not able to enjoy the present.

Here's how you can help:

- **Talk to your teen.** Let her know that you are concerned about her stress and you want to help.
- **Foster your teen's** sense of proportion. Not everything has to be perfect. Talk with her about times when “good enough” really is just that.
- **Set some limits** on your teen's study time. Encourage her to take a break after every 30 minutes of studying. Tell her that getting a good night's sleep will lead to a better test score than cramming all night. Then set—and enforce—a curfew.
- **Help your teen** avoid taking on too much responsibility the next time a group project rolls around. Agree to play the “heavy” so she can say, “Sorry—I can't do that part of the project. My mom says I have to help her around the house this weekend.”
- **Pay close attention** to your daughter's behavior. Anxious teens sometimes self-medicate, so be alert for signs that she may be using drugs or alcohol.

It Matters: Discipline

If you want your teen's attention, stop yelling



If there's one way to guarantee that your teen won't listen to you, it's to yell at her. When a parent yells at a teen, the conversation basically stops. The teen is no longer listening, and the parent is venting frustration more than trying to make a point.

Studies have found that consistent use of harsh verbal discipline is harmful. In addition to causing behavioral problems, frequently screaming at your teen can increase her risk for depression and academic troubles.

That said, teens occasionally do things that make parents want to yell. Whether your teen misses curfew or fails a test, your first reaction may be to raise your voice. Instead, speak quietly and firmly. Try to:

- **Respond, not react.** Reacting—acting on your first impulse without thinking about it—often leads to yelling. Manage your emotions and respond calmly.
- **Realize whose problem it is.** If you lose your temper over a bad grade, your teen becomes more focused on hiding from your wrath than with determining how to raise that grade. Remain calm and ask your teen how she plans to deal with *her* problem.
- **Take a break.** If you feel like you can't face your teen without screaming, leave the room. Take a deep breath and come back when you feel less angry.

Source: Society for Research in Child Development, "Harsh parenting predicts low educational attainment through increasing peer problems," *ScienceDaily*, nswc.com/high_harshdiscipline.

Teach your teen how to be a more respectful person

Your teen rolled his eyes when you asked him to take out the garbage. He used a tone of voice that would have kept you grounded for life if you had tried to use it on your parents.

What can you do if your teen behaves in a disrespectful way? Try these ideas:

- **Be a model of respect.** That doesn't mean that you have to be perfect—who could be? But when you demonstrate your values, your teen will notice. "So that's how adults behave. I want to be like that, too."
- **Let your teen know** that having strong feelings is OK, but being disrespectful isn't. Teens can—and do—get angry with parents. But that doesn't mean they can



use an inappropriate tone or foul language. Set boundaries.

- **Enforce consequences.** Act quickly and calmly when your teen is disrespectful.

Remember these guidelines for disciplining your teenager



Your teen has matured a lot since his elementary school days, but he still has a long way to go.

The part of his brain that controls impulses and helps him make good decisions has not matured yet. Your teen still needs structure and discipline.

Here are some guidelines:

- **Expect the difficult moments.** When your teen acts first and thinks later, blurts out the wrong thing or is moody, it's not necessarily because he wants to hurt you. It's important not to take it personally.

- **Be firm, yet flexible,** with your teen. Make sure your teen knows the rules and the consequences for breaking them. Consider granting him more freedom as he shows more responsibility.
- **Know the difference** between an *explanation* and an *excuse*. Your teen's age and brain development may explain some of his behavior. They are not an excuse for being rude or defiant.
- **Focus on the big issues.** These include things like safety and schoolwork. Try not to scold your teen about the smaller issues, such as an occasional messy room.