

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School
Santa Cruz Valley Union High School



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Help your high schooler take on the responsibility for learning

You are in a unique position to support your teen's success in school. While the teachers are helping students learn particular subjects, families can help them learn how to be better students. One of the most important ways is to reinforce your teen's responsibility for learning.



To foster student responsibility:

- **Encourage a proactive** approach to learning. If there is no assignment due in a class, your teen can read ahead, or review past assignments. If your teen is struggling, asking for help sooner rather than later is the responsible action.
- **Help your teen "own" mistakes.** Most teens have quite a knack for placing the blame for a poor grade or other setback elsewhere—on the teacher, on a "stupid" test. Help your high schooler figure out what personal choices and actions might have contributed to the situation. Ask questions like, "How much work did you put into preparing? Did you turn in all the assignments on time?"
- **Allow your teen to experience** the consequences of actions. If your student leaves an assignment until the last minute, don't help complete it.
- **Show that you value** responsibility-related traits like self-control and persistence. Praise these traits when you see your teen or others showing them. Model them, too. "I'm going to keep trying until I get this."



Share real-life reasons to stay in school

High school graduates make more money than dropouts—on average, almost \$9,000 more per year. But if money isn't enough to motivate your teen to stay in school and graduate, share these additional facts:

Compared to dropouts, high school graduates:

- **Have a longer life** expectancy.
- **Are more likely** to be employed.
- **Are less likely** to commit crimes or require social services.
- **Are more likely** to make contributions to their communities by voting and volunteering.

Help your teen see the difference education makes. Students caught up in day-to-day problems don't always see the big picture—the effect that finishing high school has on their lives. Too many failing grades is a top reason teens cite for dropping out. If your student is struggling, meet with a school counselor to discuss ways to get back on track.

Source: K. Barrington, "What is the Impact of High School Graduation Rates?" Public School Review.

Make school-family friends

Friends play a huge role in your teen's life. Their families can play a helpful part in yours. You can get to know other students' families by attending school events, joining the parent teacher organization and volunteering. Talk with them about challenges you share and ways to support your teens and the school.



Spark mid-year motivation

Has it been a while since you've seen your student's best effort? To revive motivation:

- **Show that you value** your teen's ideas, interests and personality.
- **Recognize progress.** A C may not be the grade you hoped for, but if your teen's last grade was a D, it's progress.
- **Suggest studying** with a friend who is doing well.

Offer a boost in math

Supporting teens' mental well-being may help them do better in math, research shows. Specifically, feeling capable and purposeful is linked with higher math grades. To encourage these feelings, help your teen:

- **Recognize personal strengths** as well as areas for improvement. Suggest reframing negative thoughts. Instead of "I'm not good at math," your teen can say, "This is confusing, so I'm going to ask for help so I can master it!"
- **Find a purpose.** When we learn something new, our brains form new connections. So even if a math skill may not seem immediately useful, your student's brain "network" is growing!



Source: T. Clarke, et al, "Helping Adolescents to Feel Competent and Purposeful—Not Just Happy—May Improve Grades," University of Cambridge.



My teen is being weight-shamed. What can I do?

Q: My ninth grader is overweight. The other kids on the school bus make mean comments about it and refuse to share a seat. My student has also begun skipping gym class because of locker-room teasing. What should I do?

A: Verbal harassment is the most common type of bullying in schools, and physical appearance is the most commonly reported target of it. This kind of bullying not only affects students' self-esteem, it also has a negative impact on attendance and academic performance.

To support your teen:

- **Make it clear** that your teen does not deserve this treatment and the bullies are at fault. Say that you are on your teen's side and will help.
- **Ask your teen to report** the behavior to the gym teacher and a school counselor or the principal, so they can address it.
- **Help your teen focus on strengths** and interests and spend more time on those activities. Doing something well provides a sense of accomplishment, and your teen may meet friends who share interests.
- **Make healthy living a priority** for the whole family, not just your teen. Talk with a doctor to set appropriate goals for nutrition and exercise.



Do you teach wise digital media choices?

Teens are spending more and more time online. Are you helping your teen keep digital media use positive and balanced with productive non-screen activities? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you allow** the use of devices for accessing educational content and activities?

___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to turn off devices during study time unless they are necessary for an assignment?

___ **3. Do you have** a digital curfew when devices must be off? Charge devices outside of sleeping teens' rooms at night to remove temptation.

___ **4. Do you suggest** alternative pastimes? Your teen can exercise, read, talk to friends and family face-to-face, etc.

___ **5. Do you help** your teen plan digital media use in advance, and stick to the plan?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen manage online time productively. For each no, try that idea.

*"The trick is to put yourself in charge of your screens instead of allowing your screens to be in charge of you."
—Dr. Edward Hallowell, MD*

Connecting aids discipline

Staying actively involved in your teen's life—by talking about school and activities, meeting your teen's friends, etc.—will help you establish and enforce effective discipline. Then, if a problem crops up, you can work with your teen to find a solution rather than imposing one. Teens are more likely to follow through on a plan they helped develop.

Encourage pleasure reading

Has reading for fun slipped off your teen's list of priorities? Pleasure reading has academic and social benefits for students. Offer a reminder that reading lets your teen:

- **Travel to exciting places** without spending a dime.
- **Become an expert** in an area of interest.
- **Play detective** and solve a mystery.
- **Enjoy a laugh.**
- **Discover people** with interests, ideas and problems similar to your teen's.



Source: N. Thadani, "The Benefits of Recreational Reading," George Mason University.

Promote processes that support student success

Here are a few simple processes that can make it easier for your teen to organize, learn and apply information in classes:

- **Color coding.** Writing assignments, new information and project details in different colors can help your teen know at a glance how to handle the material.
- **Charts and diagrams.** These can help your teen make connections and recall information later.
- **Routines.** Consistent habits for attendance, studying and time management will help your teen stay up-to-date.

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