

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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Share a test preparation plan that spreads studying over five days

Research shows that students remember more when they study material repeatedly in sessions spaced out over time, rather than cramming for hours the night before a test.

When the next test is announced, suggest that your teen try this five-day study plan:

- **Four days before:** Gather class notes, quizzes and handouts related to the material that the test will cover. Make a list of important topics.
- **Three days before:** Review the gathered materials, and add facts that are likely to be covered to the topic list. Did the teacher spend four days on the parts of a cell? Odds are, that will be on the test. Next, make flash cards of the facts to memorize, and practice recalling the information.
- **Two days before:** Look over the assigned readings. Think about essay questions the teacher might ask about important themes in the reading. Make notes about how to answer them.
- **One day before:** Create and take a self quiz. This might include writing memorized facts correctly, outlining essays and applying formulas to solve sample problems.
- **On test day:** Repeat the previous day's tasks and collect and bring all allowed materials (notes, calculators, etc.) to the test room.



Up your teen's inner drive

Internal motivation—such as curiosity, or a desire to learn—takes students farther than external factors like grades. To nurture it:

- **Praise your teen** for tackling challenges, not just for doing well.
- **Encourage honest self-evaluation** (I could do better if I studied another 15 minutes a day) and discourage harmful self-criticism (I'm so stupid).

Offer tips for better notes

Your teen's teachers may hand out outlines of the material they cover. But your student should still take notes in class. Note-taking lets students expand and clarify the basic information, and reinforces it in their minds. Remind your teen to:

- **Use phrases** and abbreviations instead of full sentences.
- **Allow room to add ideas,** questions or details later.
- **Circle unfamiliar vocabulary** or concepts and look them up later.



Practice ways to say 'no'

It is easier for teens to reject negative peer pressure when they have a stockpile of responses to use in different situations. Together, role-play times when your high schooler could:

- **Give** a personal reason. "I'm trying to make the varsity team. I don't want to mess it up."
- **Mention** consequences. "Sorry, the last person who got caught doing that was suspended. I can't risk that."
- **Dismiss** the idea. Your teen could make a face and walk away.
- **Suggest an alternate plan.** "I was going to watch a movie. Want to join me instead of going to that party?"



Exercise helps students focus and learn

No matter how prepared students are, if they arrive in class feeling sluggish or stressed out, they can't give learning their best effort. One important way to prevent these issues is to ensure that your teen gets plenty of daily exercise.

Exercise:

- **Sparks feelings** of well-being. The endorphins exercise releases also increase energy levels. If an assignment feels endless, a quick jog around the block may help your teen return to the task happier and more energized.
- **Is calming.** When teens are focused on an exercise activity, they stop focusing on worries.
- **Boosts self-confidence.** Feeling like they have control over their bodies can help teens feel like they can take control of their studies, too.
- **Strengthens memory.** Studies show that exercise stimulates brain connectivity and the forming and retaining of memories.

Source: "Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress," The Mayo Clinic.



How can I help my teen get back on the right track?

Q: My 11th grader used to get good grades (but had to be reminded to do homework). But this year, my teen has run out of gas. I don't know why, but my teen won't do schoolwork and is even skipping classes. What should we do?

A: Sometimes, students who have done well in school without a lot of effort finally hit a year when they have to do some pretty heavy lifting. If they haven't developed effective study skills, these students don't know what to do. If this could be the case, encourage your teen to ask the teachers or a school counselor for help.

Your teen may also be asserting independence by refusing to comply with expectations. The solution to that is to turn over the responsibility for learning to your student. Here's how:

- **Discuss your teen's goals** for the future and how school can help make them possible. Remind your student that high school is temporary, but education is something that will be an asset to your teen forever.
- **Offer your teen a chance** to demonstrate the ability to manage school responsibilities independently. Explain that if your teen doesn't do the work, the next stop is summer school to make up credits for any failed courses. Then, stop giving constant reminders for a marking period.

Contact your teen's school counselor for more insight on what may be going on with your teen and how to help.



Are you teaching school success skills?

Some lessons you can teach at home are just as important to your student's success in high school as the academics taught in classes. Are you reinforcing the skills and habits that support achievement? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you make** it clear that timely attendance in every class is essential and expected?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** the school rules with your teen, and the importance of following them?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your teen to ask you, teachers or counselors for help or advice rather than ignoring problems?
- ___ **4. Do you model** using time management and organization tools, such as calendars and checklists?

- ___ **5. Do you teach** your teen that self-respect comes from giving your best effort?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your teen key school success lessons. For each no, try that idea.

*"Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals."
—Jim Rohn*

Promote study sharpness

Falling asleep while studying is a common student problem. To help your teen stay alert, suggest these study strategies:

- **Sit up straight or stand.** It's too easy to doze off while lying on a bed.
- **Alternate tasks.** If your teen feels drowsy while studying history, switching to math may perk things up.
- **Stay hydrated.** Encourage your teen to drink plenty of water (not energy drinks.)
- **Take brain breaks.** A five to 10 minute break after every hour of studying can refresh your teen's ability to concentrate.

Review homework ABCs

If your teen feels overwhelmed by assignments and is wondering how to manage it all in the time available, go back to basics. Remind your teen to:

- **Dive right in.** That way, your teen won't waste time worrying.
- **Remove distractions.** Your teen's phone should go in another room.
- **Tackle the most important task first.**



Offer practice with projects

Doing projects with you gives your teen hands-on practice with planning and project management—and quality time together. You and your teen can:

- **Plan a family meal.** Discuss the budget and kinds of recipes or food you might like to try. Divide responsibilities.
- **Reorganize a room.** Has clutter become overwhelming? Brainstorm a plan of attack and carry it out, step-by-step.
- **Plan a family outing.** Consider transportation, expenses, food, etc. Teens are more invested in activities they help plan.

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