

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 establish a habit of reading for pleasure

In every subject from English to math to science to history, your teen will need to read long passages of text and understand and learn from them. These are skills that come with practice. Yet outside of school, many students never pick up a book.



Students who read regularly get better at it. They read more quickly and recall more. Reading also improves their focus and expands their vocabulary. Ask your teen to set aside 20 minutes a day to read for pleasure. To encourage this habit:

- **Pick up something to read** yourself at the same time. Later, talk with your teen about what you each have read.
- **Suggest outdoor reading.** On a warm early spring day, encourage your teen to take a book outside and read on a sunny step. Or, your teen could download an audiobook and listen while taking a walk.
- **Link reading to sports interests.** Is your teen an athlete or a sports fan? Reading a biography of a sports hero can boost your teen's knowledge and enjoyment of the game—as well as reading skills.
- **Combine reading with volunteering.** Libraries and nursing homes are just two of the places that may welcome volunteer readers.

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



Language learning gives teens a boost

Many high school students consider taking foreign language classes only if they are required to pass them to earn a diploma. But there are many other benefits to learning to speak another language.

Studying a new language can:

- **Strengthen your teen's** home language skills, including vocabulary, grammar and writing skills.
- **Boost your teen's** cognitive skills and improve memory.
- **Increase your teen's** understanding of another culture and its traditions.
- **Prepare your teen** for work in the global economy.


To support your teen's efforts:

- **Have your teen** teach you some simple phrases. Use them at home.
- **Introduce your teen** to people, places and cultural events with ties to the language.
- **Go online to find** videos and apps that let your teen hear and use the language.

Source: "The Benefits of Learning Another Language," National Education Association.

Ask about study habits

Does your teen work late into the night to finish homework that shouldn't take more than two hours? Ask two questions:

1. **When are you** most alert? Moving study time to the afternoon may help. 
2. **How many breaks** do you take? A short break every hour is OK, but too many can reduce concentration.

Stay tuned-in to your teen

How can you tell whether you are seeing typical teen moodiness and distance, or if your teen is really struggling? You can:

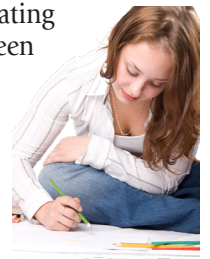
- **Regularly ask** how your teen is doing, and say you're always ready to listen.
- **Watch for** depression symptoms—such as persistent sadness that affects daily life or changes in eating or sleeping patterns.
- **Be aware of** suicide warning signs, such as feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, withdrawing from family and friends, and giving away belongings.

If you see these signs or are worried about your teen, seek professional help right away.

Time lines illustrate history

When studying history, creating a time line can help your teen see how one event led to another and put ideas into context. Have your teen:

- **Choose start** and end dates that define the period to study.
- **Summarize key events**—*who, what, when, where*—and add them to the line.
- **Add visual elements**—graphics that show key events or concepts, color coding to distinguish events, themes or people.



Source: L. Zwier and G. Mathes, *Study Skills for Success*, University of Michigan Press.



My teen wants a part-time job. Should I say OK?

Q: My 11th grader wants to make some money by working part-time after school. I know jobs can help students learn responsibility and time management, but how can I tell if my teen is ready to handle one?

A: Money is a common motivator for teens to find jobs. But not all teens can balance working and going to school.

To help you make this decision, consider these questions with your teen:

- **How many hours** will the job involve? Experts believe that most teens can handle 10 to 15 hours a week. (Some may even find their grades go up.) More than that, and schoolwork starts to suffer.
- **What will your teen do** with the money? Discuss a management plan that includes saving for medium- and long-range goals.
- **Will your teen still have time** to participate in school activities? These strengthen students' feelings of belonging at school, a factor that improves academic outcomes.
- **Will the job make** fulfilling responsibilities at home and participating in family events difficult?

If you decide to let your teen try working, explain that if it's necessary to choose between work and school obligations, school takes top priority.



Are you promoting careful work?

Careless errors can keep students from earning the grades they deserve on material they know well. Are you teaching your teen the importance of giving schoolwork careful, thorough attention? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your teen plan a schedule that allows enough time to work carefully on assignments without rushing?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** the need to pay attention to details—such as correctly citing research sources?
- ___ **3. Do you teach** that “neatness counts,” and that sloppy work—especially in math—leads to mistakes?
- ___ **4. Do you remind** your teen to double-check answers before submitting work?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your teen to take time to edit and proofread writing assignments?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen learn to work carefully. For each no, try that idea.

“The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

—Vince Lombardi

Have your teen make lists

Checklists are simple organizational tools that can help your teen have a smooth day at school. Teach your teen to create lists for:

- **Getting out the door.** What items does your teen need for school each day? (Books, lunch, laptop charger, etc.)
- **Being ready for class.** A list might include: pen, paper, homework, calculator.
- **Leaving class.** What assignment, test and due date information is needed?
- **Coming home.** What items are needed to study and complete schoolwork?



Build media literacy skills

In a recent survey, eight out of 10 teens reported seeing social media posts spreading conspiracy theories, and 80 percent of those teens were inclined to believe at least one of them. Help your student get the facts:

- **Recommend double-checking** information with reputable sources.
- **Suggest a reverse image search** to find out where pictures really come from.
- **Encourage your teen** to follow the daily news from credible news outlets.

Source: “News Literacy in America: A survey of teen information attitudes, habits & skills (2024),” News Literacy Project.

Be a booster for your teen

Supporting school success goes beyond academics. Students thrive when families:

- **Love and connect.** Spend time with your teen as a family and one on one.
- **Guide and limit.** Stand firm on rules about school, health and safety. Discuss compromises on issues such as clothes.
- **Model and advise.** Set a good example. Explain your thinking to your teen.

Source: A.R. Simpson, Ph.D., *Raising Teens: A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action*, Harvard School of Public Health.

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