

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Santa Cruz Valley Union High School

HIGH SCHOOL



November 2025

Share strategies with your teen for reading different subjects

Reading is assigned work in most high school classes. But the approach your teen takes to reading material for each subject shouldn't always be the same. Different strategies can help your student get more out of texts in different subjects.

When the topic is:

- **Math**, encourage your teen to read explanations and sample problems twice before tackling problems. A first quick read will provide an overview. Next, your teen should read more slowly, take notes, and work through the sample problems step by step. Now your student is ready to solve the problems.
- **History**, suggest that your teen start by reading any included questions or summaries to get an idea of the key points. Then, have your teen check the headings and words in boldface type, and pay special attention to any graphics, which often contain essential information. Only then should your teen start at the beginning and read through to the end.
- **Science**, encourage starting with the vocabulary. Your teen can scan the text for unfamiliar words, write them down and learn their meanings. Do any of the words contain parts that appear in other science terms? Knowing that *biology* is the study of living things can help your teen figure out that *bioelectric* means electrical activity in living things.



Help your teen develop self-respect

When students have self-respect, they understand the importance of doing their best. They know they are worthy of being treated fairly and kindly—and that it would be out of character for them to treat others differently.

To foster self-respect:

- **Make it clear** that everyone makes mistakes and hits bumps in the road. These are temporary. After learning from them, your teen can make a fresh start.
- **Discuss your teen's strengths.** Point out that people have different strengths and weaknesses. This awareness can help teens control feelings of envy or inadequacy.
- **Talk about peer pressure.** Explain that if your teen feels like something is wrong, it probably is. Role-play ways to avoid situations that might lead to trouble.
- **Speak out against** substance abuse. Remind your teen that self-respect includes respect for personal health and safety.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

Listening instills courage

When your teen has something to say, take time to listen carefully. When you hear a valid point, consider it. You don't have to agree. But by taking the ideas seriously, you help your teen build the confidence needed to speak up and contribute in school.



Encourage further research

Going beyond a basic internet search to find additional resources can help your teen build skills and create a more in-depth paper or presentation. Your student might:

- **Interview experts.** These could be people mentioned in published articles on the topic. Your teen can contact them and ask for an interview.
- **Create a survey** on the topic and include findings in the project.
- **Ask the teacher** to suggest resources to check for different points of view.

Meaning boosts memory

When memorizing, it is more effective to relate information to meaningful things than to simply repeat it over and over. Recommend that your teen:

- **Look for links.** Does *stationary* or *stationery* mean paper? Your teen could think: "*Stationery* uses envelopes."
- **Imagine a picture.** The Spanish word for narrow is *estrecho*. Your teen could imagine the word stretched out vertically until it is very narrow.
- **Form a sentence.** The number of letters in the words "I shouldn't battle again," correspond to the date the U.S. Civil War ended: 1865.



Source: "Long-Term Memories Made with Meaningful Information," *ScienceDaily*.

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What can I do to get my teen to care about school?

Q: My freshman seems to have lost interest in school. My teen either doesn't do assignments or doesn't turn them in. If I say something, I hear "I don't care if I pass or not." How can I turn this around before my teen just drops out?

A: Student disengagement has become a significant challenge in schools recently. And you are right to be concerned, because poor ninth grade performance is a recognized drop-out factor.

Every teen is different, so begin by figuring out what lies behind your teen's loss of interest. Is anything different in your teen's life than it was in middle school? Are the classes this year much harder or easier than they were then? Last year's teachers may be able to provide insight. A high school counselor may also be able to direct your teen and your family to helpful resources. Next, involve your teen in problem-solving:

- **Say you are concerned** because you care about your teen. "You may not care how you do in school, but I do."
- **Help your teen decide** on some specific, achievable goals for this year.
- **Focus on positive steps** your teen can take right now. Making up every missed assignment may not be possible, but doing tonight's reading is. Each step your student takes can provide motivation to take another.



Are you supporting your shy teen?

For shy teens, new situations can be a source of worry. Speaking up in class and connecting with other students is often a challenge. Are you doing what you can to help your shy teen cope? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you show** your love and appreciation for your teen?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your teen find and participate in activities with students who have similar interests?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your teen to try volunteering? Helping others boosts teens' self-confidence.
- ___ **4. Do you role-play** social interactions with your teen and brainstorm things to say?
- ___ **5. Do you discuss** strategies with your teen's teachers if

shyness is affecting your student's participation in class?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen learn to function well despite shyness. For each no, try that idea.

"When a shy person smiles, it's like the sun coming out."
—Anita Diamant

Support complex thinking

In high school, students are developing advanced thinking skills that help them consider multiple possibilities, hypothetical situations and abstract concepts. To help strengthen these skills:

- **Ask your teen to offer** opinions on family rules, consequences and decisions.
- **Discuss your teen's views** of the world (avoid judgmental language) and talk about your own.
- **Help your teen discover** ways to contribute in the world and gain deeper understanding of issues of interest.

Review time management

Student workloads often grow and become more challenging in the higher grades. So does the importance of effective time management skills. Remind your teen to:

- **Create a master schedule** of all responsibilities, and block out the time needed to complete them.
- **Prioritize schoolwork** when conflicts with other activities arise.
- **Set up phone reminders** to go off a few days before a big assignment is due.

Include some time for play

Adding an element of play to study time can help your teen manage stress and boost brain function at the same time. Suggest that your teen:

- **Draw a picture** of the setting of a reading assignment or act out a scene.
- **Write a song** about a science concept.
- **Create a logo** and appropriate "fan merchandise" for each side in a history conflict.



Source: K. Douma, "Playing to Learn in Middle and High School," Edutopia.

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