

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



HIGH SCHOOL

September 2025

## Talk about school in ways that promote meaningful learning

Grades are one measure of how your teen is doing in school. But when it comes to preparing for life after graduation, it is the learning your student is doing that really matters. Encourage your teen to put effort into learning this year by showing interest in the topics and concepts your teen is studying.

Ask your high schooler about:

- **Reading assignments.** What questions do they raise? Can your teen think of ways the reading connects to previously learned material? Can your student relate to the fictional characters or the issues they face?
- **Successes.** How did your teen handle the most difficult problem on the recent math assignment? How did it feel to finish all the steps involved in that big history presentation?
- **Thoughts about tests.** Was a recent test an effective way to measure how much your teen has learned? Would your teen do anything differently to prepare for the next test?
- **Experiences** that have added to your teen's understanding of a complex situation. How has new information shaped your teen's perspective?

Questions like these show what your teen is learning and thinking is important to you—and that education is about more than test scores and grades.



## Discuss responsible learning

Does your teen know what taking responsibility for learning involves? To make it clear:

- **Talk about the link** between *effort* and *outcome*. Your teen's best effort will lead to longer term learning than an easy A.
- **Have your teen create** routines for completing schoolwork. Express confidence in your student's ability to get things done independently.

## Suggest a quality review

Doing a quick review before turning in assignments can help your student improve work quality. Suggest that your teen ask and answer these five questions:



1. **Does this meet** all the expectations my teacher laid out?
2. **Is there anything** I can improve?
3. **Have I checked** for careless errors?
4. **Have I given credit** to my sources?
5. **What have I learned** from this assignment? Is it reflected in my work?



## Have an answer for attendance excuses

For generations, students have been full of excuses for why they should be allowed to stay home from school. But regular attendance—in every class, every day—drives academic achievement.

Here's how to respond if your teen serves up one of these common excuses for getting out of school:

- **"I feel sick."** Ask your teen to describe the symptoms, and then follow school health protocols. If the symptoms are vague, invisible and your teen does not have a fever, it's time for school.
- **"My grade has the day off today."** If this could be possible, call the school to make sure.
- **"I have a project due** this afternoon that I need to finish." Tell your teen that it is not OK to skip classes to do work for another class. Then, help your student plan time to complete future projects ahead of schedule.
- **"I need to rest** before the big game." Classes come before sports. Big events are no exception.

Source: L. Bauer, "School attendance: A building block of student achievement," Brookings.

## Offer reading motivation

Helping teens find interesting books to choose from can go a long way toward motivating them to read. Help your teen:



- **Consider mood.** A sad novel may not appeal if your teen needs a good laugh.
- **Look at book lists.** Many bookstores and literacy organizations compile lists of books that are popular among teens.
- **Build on winners.** A teen who has enjoyed a book could look for other works by the same author. One book on history may lead your student to a book with a different point of view.

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## My teen is not a morning person. How can I help?

**Q:** The school year has just begun, and my 15-year-old is already sleeping through first period English class. My teen says the combination of a “boring” subject and the early hour makes staying awake impossible. What can I do?

**A:** Your teen may not be a morning person—studies show that most teens are not—but paying attention in every class is important for doing well. Sleeping through class means missing out on learning. Also, the teacher is more likely to be willing to help students who are attentive.



To make it easier for your student to stay alert in class:

- **Get serious about bedtime.** Have your teen set and stick to a bedtime that allows for eight to 10 hours of sleep. Insist that digital devices be charged outside your teen’s bedroom at night to eliminate the temptation to use them. On weekends, limit staying up or sleeping in later to one hour to help your teen maintain a helpful sleep pattern.
- **Suggest that your teen ask** the teacher for a seat at the front of the room. Being able to hear and see easily can help students stay focused.
- **Review your teen’s afterschool schedule** together. Make sure it includes enough time for completing schoolwork without staying up late.



## Are you promoting positive habits?

Establishing positive habits at the beginning of the school year supports year-end achievement. Are you helping your teen get off to a strong start? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** your teen schedule daily homework and study time?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you teach** your teen to use calendars and to-do lists to track responsibilities?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you expect** your teen to read something every day?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to ask for help as soon as confusion strikes, rather than waiting?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you help** your teen fight procrastination by scheduling a weekly time to do one thing

that’s been shoved to the back burner?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are setting your teen up for a productive year. For each no, try that idea.*

*“The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.”*

*—John C. Maxwell*

## Share tips for smart study

Research has answers for common questions students and families have about studying:

- **How should students study?** Mixing topics up in a study session works better than studying one at a time.
- **Where should students study?** Studies show that studying the same material in different places on different days can help with retention.
- **What about study timing?** Students remember more when they study material in several short sessions spaced out over time, and if studying is followed by a good night’s sleep.

Source: M.N. Imundo and others: “Where and how to learn: The interactive benefits of contextual variation, restudying and retrieval practice for learning,” *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

## Motivate with praise

Praise is an effective motivator, especially for teens who are struggling academically. For the best results:

- **Tie praise to specific actions.** “Your edits made your paper so much clearer. I’m proud you kept at it.”
- **Focus your teen’s attention** on how good it feels to do a thorough job.

## Wellness helps kids do well

Well-being affects students’ performance in school. To help your teen reduce stress and focus on overall wellness this year:

- **Foster a sense of control.** Guide your teen’s thinking, but resist the urge to micromanage.
- **Promote exercise.** It improves mood and learning ability.
- **Suggest finding 20 minutes a day to relax—** by playing with a pet, journaling or making art, for example.



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