High School Parents®

March 2026
Vol. 33, No. 7

Clarke County School District

still make the difference!

Physical activity can reduce stress & boost achievement

When students are overwhelmed, their academic performance suffers—no matter how much time they spend studying. One of the most effective ways to help your teen lower stress and perform better in school is to promote daily physical activity.

Exercise isn't just about fitness; it's a powerful brain booster that:

- **Enhances mood and energy.** Exercise releases endorphins that act as natural mood lifters and increase energy. Is your teen feeling stuck on a difficult assignment? A quick break for a walk or a few laps on a skateboard can refresh your student's ability to focus.
- **Builds confidence.** When teens feel like they have more control over their bodies, it can make them feel more in control of their studies as well.
- **Provides a mental break.** Focusing on a sport or workout helps teens stop dwelling on their worries.
- **Improves memory.** Studies have shown that exercise stimulates the brain's ability to form and retain long-term memories.

If your high schooler says there is no time to exercise, talk about simple ways to fit some activity into the day. You could even plan to work out together—you could probably use the reduction in stress as much as your teenager!

Source: "Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress," Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research.

This four-step process can end procrastination

At one time or another, most students put off completing their schoolwork. But when procrastination becomes a habit, it can negatively affect school performance.

To break the procrastination habit, have your teen:

- **Select just one thing to do.** Sometimes kids put things off when they feel overwhelmed. Tell your teen to focus on one assignment at a time.
- **Set a timer for 30 minutes** and begin working on the assignment. While the timer is ticking, your teen should focus only on that task.
- **Avoid distractions.** Your teen should get water or a snack before starting the timer to avoid interrupting work flow.
- **Celebrate.** Once the timer goes off, encourage your teen to do something fun for a few minutes, such as kicking a ball around outside.

Your teen can repeat this process until schoolwork is complete!

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child : A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

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Be aware of warning signs your teen may drop out of school

The decision to drop out of high school is not typically caused by a specific event. Rather, it's a slow process that happens over time.

Recognizing the early warning signs is crucial to turn things around. Here are three key indicators to look out for:

1. **Chronic absences.** Students who miss more than five days in a marking period often fall behind in their schoolwork. This leads to frustration, which can push them to give up entirely.
2. **Lack of engagement.** Teens who consistently fail to turn in assignments, do not study for tests, or show minimal effort in class are mentally checking out. When this is coupled with behavior issues, students often become isolated from classmates and teachers and may think dropping out is their only option.
3. **Failing core subjects.** Students struggling in math, science, English, or social studies may face repeating the class or even a grade. Teens who are held back are at much higher risk of deciding to drop out.

If you notice these signs, reach out to your teen's counselor or teacher right away. Together, develop a plan to get your student back on track.

> **"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."**
>
> *—Benjamin Franklin*

Studying a foreign language has many benefits for students

Many students consider foreign language courses only as something they are required to take to graduate from high school. Help your teen see the many other benefits of learning to speak another language. Learning a foreign language:

- **Helps students improve skills** in their native language. For English-speaking students, learning a new language can sharpen vocabulary, grammar and writing skills.
- **Provides helpful practice** in speaking, listening and recalling information.
- **Prepares students** for the world outside of school. A new language exposes them to another culture and its traditions. Knowing another language also opens the door to more career options.

To support your teen's efforts in a foreign language course:

- **Ask your teen to teach you** a few simple phrases. Use them around the house.
- **Stay aware of assignments.** Ask how your teen is doing in class at least once week.
- **Look for news and TV stories** about countries whose language your teen is studying.
- **Share videos, music and books** in that language that you find at the library or online.
- **Look for festivals** and events related to the language your high schooler is studying. Make plans to attend one together.

Are you helping your teen handle peer pressure?

Peer pressure is a fact of life. Sometimes its influence is positive—like when your teen decides to volunteer because friends are. Other times, the influence can be negative, such as when a friend convinces your teen to skip a class.

Are you helping your teen resist negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you help your teen take pride** in accomplishments? Self-confidence reduces the need to seek peer approval.
2. **Do you encourage signing up** for classes and activities that match your teen's interests?
3. **Do you remind your teen** about the importance of having self-respect and avoiding activities that may lessen it?
4. **Do you reinforce the idea** that your teen is a strong individual?
5. **Do you help your teen practice** different ways to say *no*?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're helping your teen resist negative peer pressure. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Published monthly September through September.
Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.,
an independent, private agency.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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Encourage your teenager to make time for pleasure reading

High school students typically spend more time on schoolwork than they did when they were in middle school. With the increased workload, reading for enjoyment may be pretty far down on their list of priorities.

However, research shows that teens who spend some of their free time reading benefit academically and socially. Offer motivation by explaining that reading can help your teen:

- **Travel.** Few people can afford to travel every place they'd like to go. But your teen can travel through a book—and gain knowledge that may help your teen get there in person someday.
- **Become an expert.** Reading is the best way for your teen to learn about areas of interest.
- **Play detective.** A cold winter day is a perfect time for your teen to grab a cup of hot chocolate and dive into a great mystery.
- **Laugh.** Appreciating the humor in books helps teens develop thinking skills. It can also improve your teen's sense of humor.
- **Meet like-minded people.** In books that feature teenage characters, your teen is likely to encounter people that think in similar ways and face similar issues.

Source: R. Martin, "Reading For Pleasure," Right for Education Foundation.

Share practical ways to conquer common schoolwork challenges

When your high schooler is struggling with an assignment, quitting is not the answer. Instead, work with your teen to remove the roadblocks that lead to frustration, missed deadlines and low grades.

Here are common schoolwork issues and easy ways to show support if your teen:

- **Doesn't do the work,** or turn it in. Make it clear that finishing assignments is a top priority. Then, share organizational strategies. Encourage your teen to create a daily "to-do" list to track tasks and deadlines.
- **Doesn't care about schoolwork.** Provide motivation by showing the real-world connections between what your teen is learning and future goals. Offer sincere praise as your teen makes progress. At the same time, enforce a clear rule: Assignments must be completed before engaging in other activities.
- **Doesn't understand assignments** or directions. Suggest checking in with the teacher. Encourage your teen to review assignments before leaving class and ask for any necessary clarification right away.
- **Has too much work**—or not enough. Find out how your student is doing in the class. If your teen is doing fine, then the workload is probably appropriate. However, if schoolwork typically takes your student all night—or if there is only a small amount each day and your teen is struggling in the class—your teen should ask the teacher for advice.

Be patient and remember: Your supportive involvement today is the single greatest predictor of your teen's long-term success.

Questions & Answers

Q: My ninth grader is signing up for classes for next year. I want to discuss the course options, but my teen doesn't want me to be involved. Should I just let my teen pick courses independently?

A: Families and teens fight many battles over independence. Sometimes, teens need to win—but planning next year's academic schedule is not one of those times.

The choices students make now will affect their future. Everything from where they will go to college (or if they will go to college) to the careers they may pursue can be affected by the courses students take in high school.

While teens may be tempted to take only the classes required for high school graduation, make sure you and your student are aware of basic college admission requirements. For example, most colleges require high school graduates to have taken at least:

- **Four years of English.**
- **Three years of math.**
- **Three years of science.**
- **Two years of social studies/history.**
- **Two years of a single foreign language.**
- **One year of the arts.**

While many students may not be thinking about college, they still need to keep their eyes on the future. The classes your teen takes now can reduce or expand options after graduation.

Schedule a meeting with your teen and the school counselor. Together, lay out a plan for the next three years so there are lots of great choices for your teen's future.

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It Matters: Student Wellness

Pay attention to your teen's behavior

It's normal for teens to be "moody" and to distance themselves from their families. So how can you tell when your teen may be struggling? Here's what experts have to say:

- **Keep talking.** Regularly ask how your teen is doing, and make it clear you're always ready to listen. Talk about other adults your teen can turn to, like relatives, teachers, school counselors, coaches, etc. Feeling connected to family, school and the community can make your teen more likely to seek help if there's a problem.
- **Recognize symptoms.** Feelings of sadness or stress that persist and interfere with daily life may be signs of depression or anxiety. Other symptoms include avoiding favorite activities and changes in eating and sleeping habits. If you're worried about your teen, ask teachers what they've observed, and make an appointment with a doctor.
- **Learn suicide warning signs.** According to the CDC's 2023 *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, roughly one in five high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Warning signs include feelings of hopelessness, withdrawing from family and friends, giving away belongings and saying things like "There's no reason to live."

If you notice any of these signs, or if you suspect your child has suicidal thoughts, seek professional help right away.

Four strategies can improve your teen's overall wellness

Between the pressure to perform well in school and the desire to fit in with friends, stress is a common part of teen life.

To relieve it, encourage your high schooler to:

1. **Spend time in nature.** Explore nearby parks together. Suggest taking hikes, going stargazing or sitting outdoors to read or study.
2. **Engage in hobbies.** Help your teen find an activity that is relaxing and enjoyable. This could be arts and crafts, playing a musical instrument, gaming or other creative pursuit.
3. **Set priorities.** School, studying, work, sports, friends—does your teen cram too much into each day? If an overbooked schedule is the main source of stress, it's time to cut back on commitments.
4. **Get enough sleep.** Sleep is the foundation of good health and stress management. Teens require 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night. Encourage your teen to limit screen use in the hour before bedtime and keep devices outside the bedroom at night.

Help your high schooler get control over digital device use

A majority of high schoolers report feeling they spend too much time on their mobile devices and feel pressured to respond instantly to notifications and messages. This excessive digital use can negatively impact learning, academic performance and mental health.

To manage device use responsibly, ask your teen to:

- **Spend one day tracking** how many times your teen picks up a phone or other device and record the total time spent using it.
- **Reduce screen use the next day.** Brainstorm ways to accomplish this. Your teen could turn off notifications and check the phone only during specific times.
- **Adhere to technology-free times.** These are times when devices should be turned off or out of reach—during study time, family mealtime, bedtime, etc.

Source: J. Jiang, "How Teens and Parents Navigate Screen Time and Device Distractions," Pew Research Center.