High School Parents®

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Clarke County School District

still make the difference!

Develop family habits that support your teen's learning

The idea of reinforcing learning can seem tricky when your teen is in high school. You may feel like you don't remember enough to truly help. But there are other ways to help.

Families can still support learning by simply creating everyday opportunities for your student to use and apply knowledge and skills. Here's how:

- **Encourage your teen's talents,** even if they are not in the areas you would have wished for. These talents may become the foundation of a future career.
- **Ask for your teen's opinions.** Teens are usually aware of major current events and have given them some thought. Listen carefully whether you agree with the viewpoint or not. Ask *why* your teen thinks that way.
- **Talk about the jobs** people hold whenever you visit a business with your teen. Discuss the education and training needed for such a job, but keep the conversation very casual. Do not turn the occasion into a lecture.
- **Plan some family projects** that involve math skills, such as painting a room or cooking a meal. Get your teen involved.
- **Encourage your teen to research** and explore. Ask for help finding the best buy for something your family needs or getting information about a new place for your family to visit.
- **Show your interest** in anything new your teen learns at school. Ask your high schooler to explain those concepts to you.

Brain growth affects your teen's behavior

You want your teen to finish chores now, and your teen wants to spend another 30 minutes scrolling through social media. Teens and their families often find themselves locked in these types of power struggles.

Brain research suggests that this tension may occur because teenagers' brains are not fully developed. An area of the brain known as the prefrontal cortex acts as the brain's CEO. It helps adults regulate their behavior and plan ahead. Unfortunately, your teen's prefrontal cortex won't be fully developed until around age 25.

Since you can't rush brain development, experts recommend avoiding power struggles as much as you can. That doesn't mean giving in to all of your teen's demands. Instead, look for ways to involve your teen in making decisions. Saying something like, "What time will you finish your chores so we can go to the game tonight?" may eliminate a fight—and still get those chores completed.

Source: *The Teen Brain: 6 Things to Know,* The National Institute of Mental Health.

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Healthy risk-taking can have academic benefits for your teen

You may think that "taking a risk" is a dangerous thing. However, some risk taking can actually be beneficial for students.

When teens take on healthy challenges, they increase their chances for success in school—and reduce the likelihood of taking negative risks. This type of positive risk-taking helps teens develop independence, self-confidence and responsibility.

Encourage your teen to take these three types of positive risks:

1. **School risks.** Your teen could sign up for a higher-level course next school year, or try out for an athletic team, the school band or the school play. Your teen could even run for class president.
2. **Life risks.** Your teen could get to know someone new at school or sit with a different group of students during lunch. Your student could take on a physical challenge, such as training for a 5K. Or, sign up for lessons to try something new.
3. **Community risks.** Your teen could organize a volunteer effort, apply for a part-time job or start a business.

> **"Taking risks doesn't mean shirking responsibility, but embracing possibilities."**
>
> *—Vick Hope*

Encourage your teen to use a variety of resources for research

Knowing how to research is a must for high school students. At this point in school, students need more than answers. They need to know how to *find* answers.

The internet and library offer a strong foundation for research, but some projects require your teen to go further. Exploring additional types of resources will build interviewing skills, problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills. Encourage your teen to:

- **Read published articles** on the topic to find sources of information. Your teen might even call a reporter. Many are happy to share information and contacts with students.
- **Contact experts in the field.** To find experts, your teen can look online or call the public affairs offices of universities and businesses.
- **Visit local museums,** archives or historical societies. These places often hold primary source documents and original artifacts. They may have curators who can provide unique insights and materials.
- **Conduct a short survey.** Your teen could ask people a series of questions about a certain topic and include the findings in the paper.
- **Find documentaries,** educational videos or relevant podcasts. These resources may also feature interviews with key figures.
- **Talk with teachers** and the librarian. After collecting some materials, your teen could ask for suggestions on books, articles and other resources that offer a different point of view.

Are you helping your teen get needed help?

The end of the year is near—but there is still time for students who are struggling to get help. Are you doing all you can to identify issues and support your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you recognize warning signs** (failing grades, missed classes) that your teen may be having academic difficulties?
2. **Have you helped your teen** identify the possible causes of a problem, such as not doing assignments, not listening to the teacher, not understanding the assignment?
3. **Have you told your teen** that it's a sign of strength to ask for help when it's needed?
4. Have you encouraged your teen to talk to teachers or a counselor about help available through the school?
5. **Have you looked** into other resources if your teen needs more help than the school can provide?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your teen get the support to turn things around. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Recognize the early patterns of teen substance abuse

Recognizing teen substance abuse can be challenging, but it's essential for safety. Often, families miss the early signs until the problem becomes severe. Since substance abuse can be a life-or-death issue, watch for the following signs:

- **Trouble with peers.** When teens say they have no friends, are very down on themselves or start hanging around peers who have bad reputations, they could be at risk.
- **Leaving evidence.** Finding items like empty beer cans, drug paraphernalia or rolling papers suggests your teen is aware of their presence and possibly used them.
- **Apathy.** Teens involved with drugs or alcohol often start ignoring responsibilities and things they once cared about, such as family opinions, personal appearance or non-using friends.
- **Sudden academic problems.** There are many reasons for a big drop in grades. But if it happens along with other signs of substance abuse, it could be part of a pattern.
- **Unusual money issues.** Drugs and alcohol cost money. Teens sometimes take money from their homes to support their habit. On the other hand, a teen who suddenly has more money than usual may be selling drugs.

Ask seven questions to help your teen think about learning

When families ask their kids about school, they are usually most interested in grades. While that is a legitimate concern, the process of learning is just as important.

As the school year winds down, continue to show interest in what your high schooler is learning by asking questions about:

1. **Accomplishments in classes.** How did your teen go about solving the most recent challenging math problems?
2. **Recent tests.** Ask if the test was an effective way to measure how well your teen knew the material. Why or why not?
3. **Reading assignments.** Can your teen give you a summary of the plot? Does a passage remind your teen of anything? Did your teen learn something new?
4. **Working with classmates.** How did a recent group project turn out? Would your teen choose to work with those students again? Why or why not?
5. **Using new skills.** Did your teen use something learned in one class to help with a project or assignment in another class?
6. **Experiences that changed** your teen's perspective or thinking. For example, was there an interesting debate in a class?
7. **Subjects** that your teen thought about even outside of class time. What made them so interesting?

Questions like these show you are interested in what your teen is thinking. They also encourage your teen to think about the process of learning, and understand that learning is about far more than grades.

Source: "Grades vs Learning: Shifting Attention to What's Important," The Graide Network, The Chicago Literacy Alliance.

Questions & Answers

Q: There's clearly something bothering my high schooler. When I ask what's going on, my teen has nothing to say. I'm not sure what's behind this refusal to open up to me. How can I get my teen to tell me what's going on without being pushy?

A: Teens are notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to sharing problems with their families. But you should keep trying to find out what is bothering your teen.

Although it's very likely that the issue is relatively minor, it's important to address it. This is especially true if it drags on for days or weeks.

To encourage your teen to share what's happening:

- **Say you are concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about absolutely anything. Part of my job as a parent is to help you figure things out."
- **Create a distraction-free space** for conversation. Try going for a drive or a walk. Teens tend to open up when they don't have eye contact.
- **Be clear about expectations.** "I respect your privacy and your desire to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a bit more time to think it over, then let's figure this out together after dinner tomorrow night."
- **Call in support.** If your teen still refuses to talk, go to a doctor, counselor or other trusted adult. Work together to uncover what's going on with your teen.

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It Matters: Building Character

Empower your teen to make better choices

Your teen will have to make all kinds of decisions over the course of high school, from class selection to how to face difficult peer pressure. Help your teen learn how to make responsible decisions that will foster success both academically and socially.

When your teen has a choice to make, take these steps together:

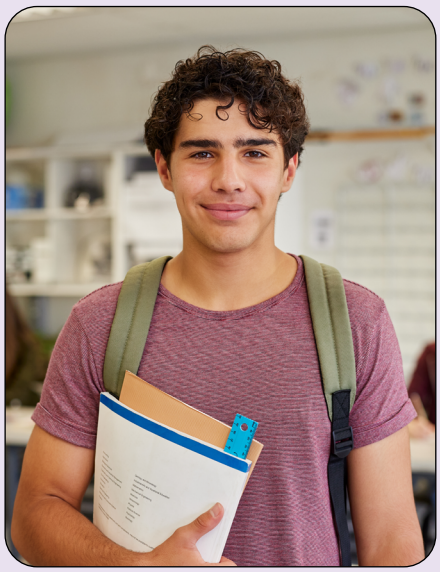
- **Ask your teen to describe** the situation. Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with just *yes* or *no*.
- **Discuss possible options.** Help your teen brainstorm different alternatives by evaluating the benefits and disadvantages of each option. Talk through ways different consequences could affect your teen's goals.
- **Allow your teen** to make a decision and carry it out. Later, ask, "What did you learn from making that choice? Would you make the same—or a different—decision if faced with a similar problem in the future?"

Remember: Sometimes teens will challenge family values and beliefs; however, they still need guidance to make important decisions about the future. Teenagers often rebel as a way to assert their independence. But with your support and unconditional love, your teen will develop the character and judgment that leads to responsible decisions.

Source: American Medical Association, "Helping Your Teen Make Responsible Choices," Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

Respectful behavior is essential for character development

To be successful, students must learn how to show respect for others—including classmates, family, teachers and coaches. Remind your teen that students should:



- **Listen politely when others speak.** This means looking at the speaker and not interrupting.
- **Show up on time.** Whether it's toband practice, history class or lunch with a friend, timely arrival shows respect.
- **Use manners.** Saying *please, thank you, excuse me* and *you're welcome* shows that your teen is considerate and appreciative.
- **Watch tone of voice.** How your teen says something is just as important as what your teen says.
- **Listen to others' opinions.** Your teen may disagree—and that's OK. Expressing opinions respectfully keeps interactions civil.
- **Be courteous online** and in text. Written communication can be easily misunderstood. Your teen should avoid sarcasm, unkind comments or sharing private information about others.
- **Accept the final word.** Many teens press their case even when an adult stands firm. Explain that this rarely works.

A positive outlook helps teens succeed in school and beyond

Many key elements of character, including kindness, empathy and leadership, are impossible to achieve by looking only at the negative side of life. That's why having a positive outlook is one of the cornerstones of character. Encourage your teen to:

- **Be hopeful.** Rather than worrying about everything that could go wrong, suggest focusing on the steps your teen can take now to make things go right. Feeling empowered is the first step toward success.
- **Move on.** Sometimes things won't go your teen's way. Acknowledge the disappointment, but after a few days, encourage your teen to accept the situation and look in a new direction.
- **Avoid comparisons.** There will always be someone who seems smarter, more talented or more fortunate. Focusing on feelings of inadequacy can extinguish positivity.