

# Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School

HIGH SCHOOL



March 2020

## Help your teen benefit from group projects and avoid the pitfalls

Teachers assign group projects for good reasons. Students can learn more when they combine their strengths and tackle a big project together. And they can develop skills—like collaboration—that employers are looking for.

Group projects can also be challenging. One student may try to dominate the group. Another may not do anything at all. Your teen may feel stuck trying to pull everything together the night before the project is due.

For success with group projects, encourage your teen to:

- **Consider members carefully.** Being comfortable together helps. But this is not the time to rely on a disorganized, overscheduled friend.
- **Discourage domination.** Studies show that when one person takes over, it can have a negative impact on the project. Your teen can make sure tasks are divided fairly, and encourage everyone to feel ownership.
- **Establish clear deadlines** and allow time for disasters. All members should do their share. But if a computer breaks down, or if someone gets sick or is slacking off, the rest of the group will have time to fill in.
- **Consult the teacher** if necessary, about how to get things back on track.

Source: K. Eckart, "Group project? Taking turns, working with friends may improve grades," UW News, University of Washington, [nswc.com/groupprojects](http://nswc.com/groupprojects).



## Point to media examples

Sometimes it's easier to get teens to make the connection between actions and consequences when the examples aren't personal. In our 24/7 media world, you don't have to look far to find reports about teens, athletes or celebrities making poor life choices.



Discuss these stories with your teen. What were the people doing that led to the negative consequences? What if they had made other choices?

## Volunteers earn experience

A volunteer job can be a great way for your teen to build a résumé that shows future employers what he is capable of. Not only can he gain marketable skills, he can also develop a record of responsible workplace behavior. Your teen might volunteer to:

- **Organize** a book club for younger students at the public library.
- **Create** a scavenger hunt or other game to engage visitors at a local museum.
- **Establish** a social media presence for a small organization that doesn't have one.



## Match reading strategy to the subject

To get the most out of her classes, your teen will have to do the reading. Using different reading strategies for different subjects can help her maximize her efforts. If your teen is reading:

- **Math**, she should read the text quickly once to get an overview, and then read again more slowly. The second time, she should concentrate on the key points and take notes. She should also work through any sample problems to be sure she knows how to go from step to step.
- **History**, she should start at the end of the chapter by reading the questions or summary. This will give her an idea of the key points. Next she should check the headings, graphics and boldfaced words. Then she should read the passage from beginning to end.
- **Science**, she should start with the vocabulary. Have her write unfamiliar words and their meanings on note cards to study. Many terms share prefixes and suffixes. Knowing their meanings can help her figure out other terms.

## Calm anxiety before tests

Learning how to perform under pressure helps students get every point they deserve on tests. If tests make your teen anxious:

- **Offer perspective.** Life is full of tests. And a single test only reflects what happened on one day in your teen's life.
- **Share relaxation techniques**, such as tensing and then relaxing her muscles, starting with her toes and working up.
- **Encourage your teen** to picture herself feeling confident and prepared.



## The college said *no*. How can I help my teen move on?

**Q:** My daughter wasn't accepted at the college of her dreams—but her friend was. My teen has other schools to choose from, but she's too upset to think about them. What can I do to help?

**A:** Your teen is learning a painful truth about the college application process: Students who have worked hard don't always get in to their top choice school. But there is another truth she needs to learn: There is no such thing as the "only perfect school" for any student. To help your teen cope and move on:



- **Empathize.** Let her know that you understand her disappointment.
- **Point out some facts.** Application numbers are at an all time high. The increased competition makes it tougher to get into some schools. And as for her friend? Colleges consider many factors when admitting students. Her friend may fit a specialized niche the school wants to fill.
- **Focus on the schools** where she *did* get in. Can she visit them again? Are there events for admitted students? Help her go with an open mind.

Chances are, your teen could thrive at many schools. Help her choose one that feels like a good fit. In a year, she can apply to transfer to her dream school if she still wants to. But by then, she will probably be happy where she is.



## Are you communicating on all channels?

In order to support your teen in school, you have to know what's going on. That can be difficult if your teen clams up. Are you doing all you can to keep the lines of communication open between you? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make** sure to spend time with your teen every day—even if it's in the car or while preparing a meal?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you plan** activities for you and your teen to do together?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you attend** school events with your teen, such as meetings, plays and games? These offer opportunities for good conversation.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you suggest** that your teen invite friends over when you are home?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you make** it a rule that your teen has to tell you where he is, and let you know if his plans change?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are using a variety of ways to stay in touch. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Communication works for those who work at it."*

*—John Powell*

## How does your teen decide?

People approach decision-making in different ways. Brainstorm with your teen about times when each of these styles might work best:

- 1. Making a quick decision** based on easily available facts, and sticking to it.
- 2. Making a quick decision**, but staying open to making a different choice if new information becomes available.
- 3. Collecting as much data** as possible before choosing one option and then sticking with it.
- 4. Collecting lots of data**, realizing that there may be many workable solutions, and testing each by imagining its outcome.

## Move study time outdoors

Spring is around the corner. But enjoying the improving weather shouldn't cut into your teen's study time.

Instead, suggest that he take learning outside. He can study flash cards on the front steps, or work at a picnic table in the park. He may even be able to find an audio version of an assigned text he can listen to while he goes for a run.



## Help your teen find readers

Experts say that teens are more motivated to write when they know their writing will be seen by an audience other than the teacher. Encourage your teen to submit writing to:

- **The school newspaper.**
- **Writing contests**, such as *The New York Times'* Student Editorial Contest, happening this month ([niswc.com/contest](http://niswc.com/contest)).
- **Online literary magazines** for teens, such as *Teen Ink* ([www.teenink.com](http://www.teenink.com)).

Source: K. Schulten, "Writing for an Audience Beyond the Teacher: 10 Reasons to Send Student Work Out Into the World," *The New York Times*, [niswc.com/publish](http://niswc.com/publish).

### Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-103x