

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

HIGH SCHOOL



October 2020

Sierra Charter School

Teach your teen the process for making well-reasoned decisions

There will be many occasions in your teen's high school career when he will have to solve a problem or make a decision that could affect his future—from selecting courses and deciding how much to study to saying *no* to negative peer pressure. Whether the issues are academic or social, having a thinking process to follow will help him make reasonable choices.

If your teen comes to you with a problem, walk him through these steps:

- 1. Describe the situation.** As he tells you what he's facing, ask open-ended questions—"What makes you think that?"—to help him understand it.
- 2. Discuss options.** Help your teen see as many alternatives as possible. Encourage him to make a pros and cons list and evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of every choice. Help him think how different outcomes could affect his goals.
- 3. Make a choice, and carry it out.** Leave the decision up to your teen. Later on, ask him what he learned from making that choice. Would he make the same one if faced with a similar problem in the future?

It may sometimes seem like your teen is challenging your values and beliefs. But with your support and guidance, he will develop the judgment that will allow him to make big decisions wisely.



Does your teen need a nap?

Is your teen getting the nine hours of sleep she needs at night? Most teens don't. Sleep researchers say that a short nap in the afternoon can help your teen be more alert and better able to focus on her studies. They recommend that teens nap before 4:00 p.m., and limit naptime to under 60 minutes.

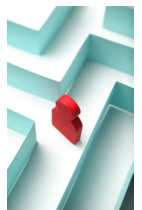


Source: X. Ji and others, "The Relationship Between Midday Napping And Neurocognitive Function in Early Adolescents," Behavioral Sleep Medicine, niswc.com/high_napping.

Get help navigating college changes

The pandemic has affected many parts of the college admissions process, from grading policies and athletic participation to college entrance exams and campus visits. Encourage your teen to contact her counselor for help answering questions about:

- **Testing dates** and procedures.
- **Application** time lines and requirements.
- **Extracurricular** and volunteer options.
- **How to adapt** to the changes.



Steer your teen toward school success

Helping a high schooler succeed academically is different from working with a younger child. Instead of being involved with every assignment, help your teen keep her eye on the big picture. Here are some important ways:

- **Have frequent conversations** with your teen about her classes and what she's learning.
- **Contact your teen's teachers** or counselor if you have any concerns about her learning or her well-being.
- **Help your teen manage** large projects. Long-term assignments are challenging for some students. Work with her to figure out what she needs to do and when and how to accomplish it.
- **Monitor her performance.** If there's a way to check grades online, do it often. Take time to discuss progress reports and report cards with your teen.
- **Stay up-to-date** with graduation requirements—classes, tests, service hours, etc.—and your teen's progress toward meeting them.

Math on paper adds up

Your teen may be doing more and more learning online. But when it comes to doing math homework, one recent study suggests that a pencil and paper are the tools to use.

When given a problem set to work on, students who were told to do their calculations on paper scored higher than those who used an online tool. This may be because "showing their work" lets students:

- **See** mistakes more easily.
- **Focus** on mathematical relationships, because they don't have to remember the numbers they can see on the paper.

Source: W. Hinkley and others, "The Benefits of Using Pencil and Paper in Math," Reboot, niswc.com/mathpaper.



How can I motivate my teen to do more than coast?

Q: My daughter talks about improving her English grade this year. But she isn't really doing anything about it. What can I do to get her motivated?

A: Students are still adapting to changes brought on by the pandemic. Helping your daughter develop self-motivation will make it easier for her to rise to the challenge. It's great that she has a goal. But it's figuring out *how* to reach their goals that helps motivate students. Encourage your teen to:



- **Set a specific goal** and write it down. "I want to earn at least a B on my next big writing assignment."
- **Outline the steps she'll take.** "I will take the time to draft, revise and proofread my paper. I'll ask my teacher if I can submit a rough draft for feedback before I write the final draft." Make sure your teen is realistic—planning to write four hours a night is useless if she isn't going to do it.
- **Consider obstacles.** "I have a lot of other homework and a yearbook meeting every Tuesday night."
- **List solutions.** "I will start the day I get the assignment, so there will be enough time to schedule writing sessions around other commitments."
- **Post her plans.** Seeing them often will help her stick with them.



Do you link freedom to responsibility?

It's natural for your teen to want more freedom. But it's never been more vital that he learn to behave safely and responsibly when on his own. Are you teaching your teen what independence involves? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you review** your rules for your teen regularly, and make adjustments if needed?
- ___ **2. Do you support** your teen's need for autonomy by giving him opportunities to make choices?
- ___ **3. Do you give** your teen complete responsibility for some areas of his life?
- ___ **4. Do you discuss** the responsibilities that come with additional freedoms?
- ___ **5. Do you write down** the agreements you make with

your teen and make sure you both stick to them?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen understand the link between freedom and responsibility. For each no, try that idea.

"We cannot protect our children from life. Therefore, it is essential to prepare them for it."

—Rudolf Dreikurs

Be specific about reading

Teens are more likely to carry out specific instructions than vague suggestions. Instead of saying "You really should read more," try suggesting a specific title. To find materials that will appeal to your teen, check out:

- **Goodreads** (www.goodreads.com). Read reviews of thousands of books, and view a list of popular books for teens.
- **The book finder** from the Young Adult Library Services Association (booklists.yalsa.net), a searchable database.
- **Poetry for Teens** from the Academy of American Poets (poets.org/poetry-teens). Find poems by topic and suggested books.

Questions improve notes

Taking notes helps students remember what they read. Asking reporters' questions—*Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?*—can help your teen identify what to write down. When he reads history, for example, have him jot down answers to: *Who* was there? *What* caused the event? *Where* did it happen and *when? Why* does it matter? *How* did it turn out?



Exercise for mental health

Teen depression is on the rise. So is the amount of time that teens are physically inactive. And recent research suggests that too much time sitting still increases the risk that a teen will become depressed.

In a study of 4,257 adolescents, researchers found that kids whose inactivity levels increased over time had higher depression rates. Kids who added even one hour per day of light physical activity had lower rates.

Encourage your teen to get up and move around often and stick to an exercise routine.

Source: A. Kandola and others, "Depressive symptoms and objectively measured physical activity and sedentary behavior throughout adolescence: a prospective cohort study," *The Lancet Psychiatry*, nswc.com/sit.

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