

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



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Memorizing with mnemonics can help your teen retrieve facts

Mnemonic devices are learning strategies for recalling information. If your teen has ever recited, "Thirty days hath September ..." to remember the number of days in a month, he has used a mnemonic. Mnemonics work best when students are familiar with the material, but need a way to recall it easily. There are several different types. Suggest that your teen experiment with:



- **Mapping.** Have your teen make a mental map of your home. Then he can connect each fact in his mind to a specific area. To recall them, he can take a mental walk through the house.
- **Music.** It worked to teach the ABCs! Have your teen set key facts to a popular song and he'll never get it out of his head.
- **Acrostics.** The first letter in each word stands for an item in a list to be memorized. Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally, for example, indicates the order of operations in math: *parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction*.
- **Chunking.** It's easier to remember small chunks of information, so have your teen divide long lists of facts into smaller groups.
- **Chaining.** Your teen can create a silly story that links together pieces of information. Each item should lead him to recall the next item.

Source: E. Heerema, MSW, "9 Types of Mnemonics to Improve Your Memory," Verywell Health, [niswc.com/high_remember](https://www.verywellhealth.com/high_remember).



Encourage motivation—don't force it

You can't make your teen feel motivated. But you can create conditions that help her get there on her own. Here are some do's and don'ts:

- **Do connect** your teen's goals to the task at hand. For example, putting effort into her English paper will strengthen her writing skills. That may make writing college application essays easier.
 - **Do discuss** problems with your teen. Help her find a solution rather than imposing one on her.
 - **Do acknowledge** effort and prompt your teen to think about
- how good it feels to accomplish something.
 - **Don't nag** or lose your temper. It doesn't work, and it ends up creating distance between you and your teen.
 - **Don't always** bail your teen out. Let her face the consequences of her actions—or inactions.

Source: J. Nelsen and L. Lott, *Positive Discipline for Teenagers*, Three Rivers Press.

Stay engaged in daily ways

Whether or not you understand your teen's class material, you can support his learning every day. Students benefit when parents:

- **Ask questions.** What is working for your teen this year? What isn't?
- **Maintain high expectations.**
- **Stay familiar** with class, testing, and project schedules. Asking, "Isn't your chemistry test tomorrow?" reminds your teen that you are paying attention.

Reinforce source evaluation

Your teen can probably find any information she wants online. But that doesn't mean it will be true. So it's vital that she know how to evaluate her sources. Remind her to:



- **Consider the purpose.** Is the site selling a product or promoting an agenda?
- **Compare sites.** Comparing two or three sites on a similar topic can help her see the limits of each.
- **Look for advertising clues.** If a sidebar says "sponsored content," it's an ad.

Shine a light on character

Studies point to certain character traits that can increase the chances of student success. To bring out your teen's:

- **Self control**, give him meaningful responsibilities.
- **Optimism**, help him look for ways he can change things for the better.
- **Curiosity**, show interest in what he is learning. "Wow, zebrafish can regrow their fins? Can anything else?" Suggest that your teen do some research to find out more.



Source: P. Tough, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.



How should I handle my teen's dislike for a teacher?

Q: My daughter is having a hard time dealing with one of her teachers. She has disliked teachers before, but this seems worse. Everything my teen says about this teacher is negative. What should I do?

A: High school students take many different kinds of classes with many different kinds of teachers. They may encounter a teacher they just don't like. The best thing you can do to help your teen is to empower her to manage the situation herself.

To guide her along the way:

- **Hear your teen out.** Let her know she doesn't have to like a teacher. Then say that she does have to learn how to work with people she dislikes. Affirm that she is capable of doing this.
- **Help her think** about what might be causing the problem. Does she wish the teacher gave more feedback? Does the teacher treat her differently from others? Keep in mind that you are getting only your teen's viewpoint.
- **Encourage your teen** to ask the teacher for a meeting. She can bring up the issues she identified and work with the teacher to find solutions.
- **Continue to watch and listen.** Are things improving? If not, you may want to request a conference with the teacher and your teen.



Are you promoting civic responsibility?

Teens want to make the world a better place. But they don't always know how to make a difference, or even if they can. Are you teaching your teen how to make positive contributions? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** rights and responsibilities—and the link between them—with your teen?
- ___ **2. Do you make** it clear to your teen that you expect him to be honest with everyone?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** the need to make the right choice even if it isn't popular?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** with your teen about current events and ask his opinions about them?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your teen to take peaceful and

appropriate action if he is concerned about an issue?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen become an upstanding community member. For each no, try that idea.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discuss alcohol dangers

Boredom, stress and social isolation are all pandemic side effects. They are also common reasons teens abuse alcohol.

Did you know that alcohol interferes with the immune system's response to infection? And that's not all. Alcohol also negatively affects teens' brain development. Teen alcohol use can lead to poor memory, poor self-control, reduced problem-solving ability and reduced visual and spatial skills.

Talk with your teen about the dangers of alcohol use. Let her know that there are better ways to cope with problems—and you will help her find them.

Source: "Alcohol and the COVID-19 pandemic," Power to the Parent, niswc.com/no-alcohol.

Teens learn by finding answers for themselves

Recent research shows that when students look up answers to schoolwork questions on their phones, they often don't remember them long-term—and they score lower on tests of the material later.

Encourage your teen to figure out the answer for himself—by solving the problem, checking his notes or looking in a textbook. After he thinks he's got it, he can use his phone to double-check.

Source: Rutgers University, "Smartphones are lowering students' grades, study finds," EurekaAlert, niswc.com/phonecheck.

Every class matters

Many students think skipping a class isn't a big deal. But they're wrong. Teens who skip:

- **Fall behind** because they no longer grasp the topic.
- **Are more likely** to consider dropping out, and less likely to enroll in higher education.

Make it clear to your teen that skipping class is not an option. If she has a legitimate reason, let the school know.



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