

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



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Help your teen overcome the 'peer effect' on risk-taking

Teens and risk-taking. It's something every parent worries about—especially in a year when many previously ordinary teen activities seem risky. Why do teens who know how to behave safely and responsibly still choose to do the opposite?

Brain researchers have learned that teens may actually be wired to make bad decisions and take risks when their friends are watching. In one experiment, teens and adults played a short driving video game. They were rewarded for finishing quickly, as long as they followed basic traffic rules. Half the time, the teens and adults played alone. The rest of the time, they were told that their peers were watching in another room.



The result? When teens thought peers were watching them, they experienced increased brain activity and took many more risks. *The peer pressure was simply the presence of peers.* On the other hand, when adults thought peers were watching, their brain activity and behavior did not change.

What does this mean for parents of teens? Perhaps most importantly, never assume that your teen will make responsible choices when he's with friends. Before he goes out, review the rules—and help your teen think through the consequences of his actions.

Source: J. Joormann, Ph.D., "Why Adolescents Make Riskier Choices When With Their Peers," *Psychology Today*, niscw.com/teenrisk.



Have a serious talk about cheating

Studies show that the majority of high school students cheat at one time or another. Teens are under a lot of pressure to do well, and many see cheating as a way to lessen some of that pressure. Technology makes cheating easier, and because "everyone does it," many teens don't view it as a serious offense.

Explain to your teen that in fact, cheating is one of the most serious academic offenses there is. Let her know that:

- **Cheating is always wrong**—even if it is easy and no one would ever know.
- **It's cheating to copy** a friend's work, and it's also cheating for your teen to let a friend copy hers.

- **You would rather** your teen do her best and earn a low grade than score higher by cheating.
- **Cheaters cheat themselves.** Discuss the real-world uses for what your teen is learning. She may see that learning it will help her more than cheating will.

Source: C. Whitney, Ph.D., "Cheaters Never Win? Many U.S. High School Students Disagree," *Howstuffworks*, niscw.com/cheaters.

Keep motivation flowing

By now, your teen may feel like school has been in session forever. She may be tempted to slide into winter break. To help her stay focused and motivated:

- **Review her engagement.** If she has missed any classes or assignments, help her set some goals for timely performance.
- **Encourage her to make checklists** of everything she still has to do. Will she need to work on assignments over break?
- **Remind her that school** is her top priority—now and throughout the year.

Study can be a group effort

Studying with other students can be a great way for your teen to prepare for tests. The key is to form a group that *really* studies. Share these tips:

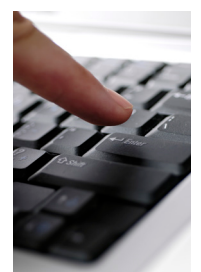


- **Keep the group** small. Select members who can separate work from socializing.
- **Divide the work.** Give members assignments that play to their strengths.
- **Stick to a schedule.** Whether online or in person, meetings should follow an agreed upon agenda. The group should appoint a leader to keep things on track.

Use a completion checklist

The big project your teen has been working on is finished! Before he turns it in, have him ask himself these questions:

- **Did I follow** the directions exactly?
- **Can I honestly say** this is my own work?
- **Did I list** all my sources in the correct format?
- **Did I proofread** for careless errors?
- **Am I satisfied** with what I am turning in?





How can I help my teen start to focus on the future?

Q: My daughter is a junior. Whenever I ask about her thoughts about her future, she just says “I don’t know.” She’s going to need to prepare for a career. How can I help her begin to figure this out?

A: There are lots of teens who don’t know what they want to do for a career—and that’s OK. But it’s not OK to avoid thinking about the possibilities.

To help your teen approach the topic, ask her to consider:

- **The classes she likes.** Is there an area where she feels her skills are strongest? Does she enjoy doing the assignments for a class? Help her learn about careers that involve the skills she uses in those subjects.
- **Her interests outside of school.** Does she like to spend time outdoors? Play online games? Does she like to lead or be part of a team? Would she rather do activities with others or alone?
- **Ways to learn about different jobs.** Encourage her to talk with anyone you or she knows who works in a field that interests her. Her counselor may also be able to connect her with alumni in those fields and help her learn about degrees or training she might need to prepare for them.

Try not to push your teen in a specific direction. Instead, guide her toward a future that is the best fit for her.



Are you supportive during struggles?

It’s normal for students do better in some subjects than others. But what if your teen is really struggling in a class? Do you know how to help him handle academic issues? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your teen why he thinks he is having difficulty in the class?
- ___ **2. Do you have** your teen schedule time to study for this class every day?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your teen to ask the teacher to help him develop a plan for improvement?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your teen find resources that can help, such as online videos or tutoring?
- ___ **5. Do you point out** and praise signs of progress?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are taking positive steps to help your student help himself. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

“Believe me, the reward is not so great without the struggle.”

—Wilma Rudolph

Join in the fun of reading

Winter break is the perfect time to encourage your teen to pick up a book just for fun. He’s more likely to do it if everyone around him is reading, too. Your family could:

- **Read the same book.** Ask your teen to lead an informal discussion about it.
- **Have a movie marathon** of films based on books. Let each family member choose one. The catch? Everyone has to read their book first.

Help your teen learn to take the long view

Teens often react quickly and impulsively. But it takes long-term thinking to achieve school and life goals. When your teen can’t figure something out right away, talk about the rewards of persistence. When she shows you a “gotta-have-it” item, help her calculate when she can afford it by saving at different rates. Show her that long-term thinking can help her get what she wants in the end.



Teach values step by step

The values you instill in your teen will be the ones he brings to his studies and his interactions with classmates and teachers. To help him learn them, try this process:

- 1. Explain the values** that matter to you.
- 2. Share news stories** with your teen that demonstrate your values in action.
- 3. Set an example.**
- 4. Ask him to live** by your family’s values.
- 5. Provide opportunities** for your teen to put values into practice.
- 6. Praise him** for demonstrating values.
- 7. Discuss ways to handle** situations when it’s hard to practice your values.

Source: T. Lickona, *Character Matters*, Touchstone Books.

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