

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



September 2021

Title 1 Cooperative

Educational Service Unit #10

Partner with the school to make this year a success for your teen

Last year's challenges highlighted the significant value a working relationship between families and schools has to student achievement. Whether this is your teen's first year in high school or his last, you can help make it successful by preparing for teamwork from the start.

Communication is the first step. Take time now to:

- **Check that you can access** school communications methods, such as an online parent information system, email newsletter, social media, etc. If you need help, contact the school.
- **Collect the names** and contact information for your teen's teachers. Also find out how to contact the principal, the attendance office and your teen's school counselor. Make sure the school has your most current contact information on file.
- **Connect with your teen's teachers.** Participate in back-to-school night or schedule an appointment to talk. You'll be able to learn about the teachers' expectations for students this year. Teaming up now makes it easier to work together later if a problem arises.
- **Verify with your teen's counselor** that your student is on track to graduate and be admitted to higher education. Even if your teen isn't sure college is in his future, he should take courses that leave that option open.



Have your teen keep personal records

Four years is a long time to teens. So when the time comes to fill out college, scholarship and job applications, they can struggle to think of all they have done in high school to prepare for those goals. Creating a portfolio can help.

A college and career portfolio can be a box, folder or computer file. In it, your teen can store details about:

- **Academics.** Have your teen keep a list of the courses she has taken and plans to take to fulfill requirements. She should record her grades and standardized test scores.
- **Activities.** Your teen can write down the clubs, sports, jobs and other activities she participates in, the dates she does them and any leadership positions she has held.
- **Skills and accomplishments.** Becoming proficient in a computer program or a foreign language, making the honor society, winning an essay contest, advancing to a state competition with the robotics team are a few examples of the kinds of things to include.

Achievement takes effort

Students often think academic ability is something they are born with—or without. But what really matters is *effort*. Help your teen figure out what's working and develop her strengths. Praise progress, and focus more on learning than on grades.



Start an attendance habit

One of the most vital habits to help your teen establish early this year is attendance. Not only will attending every class help address pandemic gaps in learning, studies show that:



- **Students who miss** several days in September are five times more likely to be chronically absent the rest of the year.
- **Teens who miss school** frequently are more likely to drop out.

If your family is facing attendance obstacles, work with the school to find out how to make sure your teen stays on track.

Source: L.S. Olson, "Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance," Baltimore Education Research Consortium.

Give school a personal spin

Seeing how academic topics relate to their own lives boosts students' interest in them. Brainstorm with your teen about ways to use what he's learning. To reinforce:

- **Math,** show your teen how he can use it to budget for the new phone he wants, or to design the perfect skateboard ramp.
- **English,** ask him to find a quote in a book he's reading that he would be willing to wear on a T-shirt.
- **Science,** help him apply his skills to a personal issue. If he hates taking out the trash, how could he make less of it?

Source: E. Blad, "When Are We Going to Use This? Strategies to Help Students Find Relevance in School Work," *Education Week*.



How can I ease my teen's worries about senior year?

Q: I thought my teen would be excited to be a senior. But after the ups and downs of last year, she's sure that fun won't be allowed, and she just seems stressed about life beyond graduation. How can I help her enjoy this special time?

A: Your teen has lived through a prolonged upheaval of "normal" life. And she's facing more big changes ahead. It's not surprising uncertainty is making her anxious.



Help make this year a good one by giving your daughter your time and support. Teens may be able to have more freedom this year than last, but they still get a sense of security from their parents. Involve your teen in household tasks, so she'll feel competent to do them when she's on her own. Do some special things together. To ease her stress about the future:

- **Help her research** and finalize her list of schools to apply to if college is her goal. Find out about deadlines, and have your teen block out plenty of time on her calendar to fill out applications.
- **Help her consider** her options if college is not her plan. Community colleges and technical schools offer shorter programs that can help her qualify for a skilled job. And she may be able to transfer credits to a four-year college later if she changes her mind.



Are you emphasizing school success basics?

Getting back into the swing of school after a long break will be easier for your teen if you reinforce the skills that support achievement. Are you smoothing your teen's transition? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you talk** about the importance of being on time for every class, whatever format it takes?
2. **Do you review** the school rules with your teen, and let him know you expect him to follow them?
3. **Do you discuss** your teen's expectations about school, and the need to be flexible about changes?
4. **Do you encourage** your teen to use calendars and checklists to manage his time?

5. **Do you remind** your teen to ask you, teachers or counselors if he needs help or advice?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are setting the stage for a positive year. For each no, try that idea.

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."
—Florence Taylor

Share memory-sharpeners

When your teen makes a long-term memory, she adds to the store of knowledge she can apply to future learning. Encourage your teen to use these effective memorization strategies:

- **Practice recalling material.** Your teen can teach it to you, or quiz herself.
- **Give it meaning.** To memorize vocabulary words, for example, your teen could write a story using those words.
- **Study and then sleep.** While she gets much needed rest, your teen's brain will still be working on retaining the material she fed it before bed.

Source: "Memorization Strategies," The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Help your teen self-regulate

Executive function skills help students control their feelings and behaviors in ways that support their goals. To strengthen these skills, suggest that your teen:

- **Use self-talk.** He can tell himself he'll do well because he'll give his best effort.
- **Consider the advice** he would give another student. "Don't wait until the last minute. Get started the day you get the assignment." This can make him more willing to take the advice himself.

Source: S. Merrill, "8 Ways to Bolster Executive Function in Teens and Tweens," Edutopia.

Make schoolwork routine

Completing assignments is your teen's responsibility, but there is one key way you can help: Have her create a homework routine. Now is the time for her to:

- **Choose a regular** homework time.
- **Set up a workspace** with necessary supplies.
- **Get organized** and establish a system for tracking assignments.



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