

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title 1 Cooperative

Educational Service Unit #10

Insist on academic honesty and help your teen say no to cheating

Studies of cheating in high school show that many teens don't see it as a serious violation. In surveys, more than half of the students admitted to cheating on tests and assignments. And colleges are reporting a widespread increase in the use of technology for cheating during the pandemic.



The research shows that:

- **Students believe** that "everyone does it." Many teens think that they will be at a disadvantage if they *don't* cheat.
- **Cheating is easier** than ever before. Students can download entire papers online, text pictures of tests to friends, and get answers to exam questions from online "tutoring" services.
- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower achieving peers. And the more pressure they feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.

Talk with your teen about the importance of academic honesty. Discuss the fact that students who cheat hurt themselves as well as others. Make it clear that you won't tolerate cheating in any form: copying homework answers, giving or receiving help during a test, using someone else's work or ideas without giving them credit, handing in work done by someone else, etc.

Source: J. Moody, "How Cheating in College Hurts Students," U.S. News & World Report; A. Simmons, "Why Students Cheat—And What to Do About It," Edutopia.



Maturing teens still need parents' time

As your teen grows and changes, your relationship with her should also evolve. But spending time together is still an essential element for keeping that relationship strong. To make the most of your time with your teen:

- **Give her at least 15 minutes** of your attention each day. Let her choose what you'll do. She may want to talk about something that's bothering her, play a favorite game, or just watch a video. The important thing is that you focus on your teen.
- **Discuss her problems**, but keep advice to a minimum. Every time you solve a problem for your teen, you send the message that you don't think she can solve it for herself. Instead, listen, ask questions, empathize and express confidence that she will make the right decision.
- **Demonstrate your interest** in her. Talk about what she's doing in school. Attend her games and performances whenever possible. Being there shows your teen how important she is to you more than words can.

Rule out skimping on sleep

Research shows that not only is sleep vital for teens' health and alertness in class, it can also help students navigate stressful social situations more effectively. One recent study of ninth graders found that adequate sleep helped the students facing social issues problem-solve and seek useful peer support.

Source: Michigan State University, "How Sleep Helps Teens Deal with Social Stress," ScienceDaily.

Checklists put your teen in the pilot seat

Pilots use checklists to help avoid costly errors and delays. A set of checklists can also help your teen prepare for a smooth ride in school. Suggest that she create lists for:



- **Morning take off:** What does she need for school? Books, charger, lunch, signed form, etc.
- **Mid-flight stops:** What does she need to have before her arrival in each class? What are the assignments and due dates she needs to know before leaving?
- **Preparation for landing:** What does she need to have with her in order to study and complete homework?

'Mind maps' connect ideas

Mind-mapping is a technique that helps students learn new material by relating it to things they already know. Have your teen:



- **Write down the main** word, phrase or idea of the new material.
- **Write related words** or concepts he knows around the main word.
- **Add new words** or concepts as he reads about the subject.
- **Edit the map** by using lines or color to organize related concepts.



How can I help my reluctant decision maker?

Q: My son struggles with making decisions. He can't seem to make his mind up about anything! He's a junior, and it won't be long before he has big decisions to make. How can I help?

A: Decision-making is challenging for many teens. But for some, fear of making the wrong choice can lead to almost total paralysis.

To help your teen learn to decide:

- **Teach him to think through his options.** Encourage your teen to make lists of the pros and cons of each alternative. Sometimes, seeing things written down can make the choice easier.
- **Ease worry about mistakes.** Discuss the fact that things don't always work out the way we plan—and that's OK. Your teen can learn something from any choice he makes, even if it's simply what *not* to do next time.
- **Offer lots of low-risk opportunities.** Suppose your teen has a weekly chore he's responsible for. On Monday, say, "You need to vacuum your bedroom before this weekend. You decide when you want to do it." Don't keep reminding him. Leave the choice of timing up to him. If he doesn't complete the task by the deadline, impose a consequence.
- **Have him set deadlines** for big decisions. "You have until Tuesday to decide if you want to accept Mr. Brown's job offer."



Are you limiting peer pressure's power?

The desire to be liked by peers is a powerful motivator for teens—and it can sometimes outweigh their judgment. Are you helping your teen avoid giving in to negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your teen to value her ideas and accomplishments? "You can be proud of the way you ..."
- ___ **2. Do you help** her think of herself as an individual? Ask her opinions, and avoid speaking for her.
- ___ **3. Do you teach** your teen that she deserves respect, from herself as well as others?
- ___ **4. Do you remind** your teen to avoid doing anything that could make her lose respect for herself?

- ___ **5. Do you role-play** sticky situations your teen may face so she can practice responses?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are boosting your teen's ability to stand up to peer pressure. For each no, try that idea.

"Stay true to yourself.
An original is worth
more than a copy."

—Suzy Kassem

Foster internal motivation

Curiosity and an inner desire to learn are more powerful motivators than external factors like grades. To nurture your student's internal motivation to learn:

- **Offer praise for tackling** rigorous classes, not just for doing well.
- **Urge your teen to evaluate** progress toward goals. Encourage honesty ("I could do better if I studied another 20 minutes a day") but discourage harmful self-criticism ("I'm so stupid").
- **Encourage your teen to use** effective learning strategies, such as reading material aloud and creating practice quizzes.

Try a time management tip

If time management is a challenge for your teen, he may have a solution in his pocket. Teens love their phones, so have your teen use a digital calendar app on his to set up reminders for himself. He can set the calendar to alert him a few minutes before his study time is scheduled to begin or a few days before an assignment is due.



Support learning at home

Your teen is responsible for her learning, but there are many ways you can support her without taking over:

- **Ask specific questions** about your teen's classes. "What are you learning in chemistry this week?"
- **Prioritize reading.** Talk to your teen about books, newspaper and social media articles—anything you have read lately. Share items she might find interesting.
- **Create everyday opportunities** for her to apply her skills: calculating expenses, researching answers to questions that come up, giving reasons for her opinions.

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