

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

Express expectations for your teen that encourage achievement

Studies show that teens strive to reach their parents' expectations for them. And over time, teen's expectations for themselves begin to match the expectations their parents have expressed. Holding high expectations for your teen can motivate him to put more effort into schoolwork and complete more years of school.



To set expectations that inspire:

- **Consult your teen.** Discuss what you would like him to achieve in high school—and ask what he hopes to achieve. Your teen's dreams for himself may be different from your dreams for him. Support his interests as much as you can. At the same time, encourage him to challenge himself and keep his options open. Talk about the value of education and effort to success.
- **Be realistic.** Your expectations for your teen should be attainable—by him. Celebrate his strengths, but remember that no one is an expert at everything. In areas where your teen struggles, focus more on progress than specific grades.
- **Offer support.** Talk with your teen about potential careers or college plans and the pathways to get there. Let him know you think he is capable of achieving, and avoid comparing him to anyone else.

Source: J. M. Froiland and M.L. Davison, "Parental expectations and school relationships as contributors to adolescents' positive outcomes," *Social Psychology of Education*, Springer.



Ease test anxiety to improve results

Does your teen's stomach do flip-flops at the thought of a huge test? Although you can't take the test for her, there are ways you can help her reduce anxiety and prepare to do her best. When a test is announced:

- **Chat together.** Ask your teen why she thinks she is feeling nervous about it. Does she not understand the material? Sometimes putting concerns into words can make them less scary, and allow your teen to think about ways to address them.
- **Help her make** a study plan. Your teen should figure out the time she needs to learn and review the material, as well as to do things like create and answer practice questions and make flash cards. Have her block the time out on her calendar.
- **Remind her of past** successes. "I know you're worried about the big chemistry test, but remember how well you did on the history test when you really studied?" Let her know that you believe she will give her best effort, and that she can be successful this time, too.

Spur thoughtful reading

To encourage your teen to think about what he reads, scroll through some news articles and select at least one he might find interesting.

Read it yourself, then ask your teen to read it. Later, ask what he thought of the article. Did he learn anything new? What evidence did the author provide?



Power struggles are no-win

Demanding a particular action from your teen—"Finish your homework right now"—is likely to result in a power struggle if she has other ideas.

Experts recommend avoiding power struggles with teens. That doesn't mean you should let your teen do everything her way. Instead, involve her in finding solutions that work for you both. Asking "What time will you do your homework so we can still watch the game tonight?" may eliminate a fight—and still get the work in on time.

Source: J. Whitlock and M. Purington, "Dealing With Power Struggles," The Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery.

Solve a math problem

Teens who hit a rough patch in math may feel that they have reached their limits in the subject. Don't let your teen give up! Share these strategies for overcoming math obstacles:

- **Do all assignments.** Falling behind makes the next lesson harder to understand.
- **Ask questions.** There is no reason to hesitate—if your teen is confused, he's probably not the only one.
- **Talk through** problem-solving steps with a study buddy.
- **Go online.** Search for a math concept to find helpful explanations and videos.





How can I help my shy teen break out of her shell?

Q: My daughter is a good student and a great photographer. But she's so shy! Put her with a group of teens and she just freezes up. I thought she would grow out of this, but it's getting worse. How can I help her?



A: Shyness is not something people grow out of. But they can learn to manage it. Your task is to help your teen accept herself the way she is and still build the social skills she needs to participate actively in school and with her peers.

To develop your teen's social confidence:

- **Provide perspective.** Let your teen know she's not the only person who has difficulty in social situations. Shyness is a common trait.
- **Emphasize her strengths.** She may be a great listener, or have good insights into people.
- **Offer opportunities** for your teen to speak up. Encourage her to share her thoughts and views in family settings.
- **Help her practice** social interactions. Suggest that she prepare a few questions she can ask when she meets someone new.
- **Have her look for ways** to work with other kids in small groups. Is there an art club she can join? Could she work on the yearbook?



Are you modeling values and character?

Some personality traits are inborn. But character is shaped by the people around us, particularly family. Are you instilling the character traits you value in your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you use** everyday situations as teachable moments to discuss values with your teen?
- ___ **2. Do you live** according to the values you want your teen to have? Your example is the best teacher.
- ___ **3. Do you look** for ways you and your teen can benefit your community, such as by volunteering or helping a neighbor?
- ___ **4. Do you praise** your teen when you see him demonstrating positive character traits?

- ___ **5. Do you talk** together about people in the news who are character role models?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen become a person of good character. For each no, try that idea.

"Character is the real foundation of all worthwhile success."

—John Hayes Hammond

Address attendance excuses

Regular attendance—all year long—is critical for school success. Here's how to respond to common excuses for wanting to skip school:

- **"If I could just sleep** for an extra hour, I'd be so much more productive." Explain that in that case, your teen can go to bed an hour earlier tonight.
- **"I have a project due** this afternoon that I haven't finished yet." Say that being disorganized is not a valid reason to skip.
- **"I need to rest** before the big game." Remind your teen that school comes before sports and other extracurriculars.

Share a five-day study plan

Studying all night before a test isn't recommended. Teach your teen a five-day plan instead.



- Day 1:** Gather notes, outlines, quizzes and handouts on the material.
- Day 2:** Review materials and list facts to know. Practice recalling them.
- Day 3:** Write questions the teacher might ask. Make notes on the answers.
- Day 4:** Take a self-quiz. Apply formulas and write out answers.
- Day 5:** Do a final review and repeat Day 4.

Time lines clarify history

Creating a history time line can help your teen put the events she's studying into context. To make one, your teen should:

- **Set boundaries.** When did the era she's studying begin and end?
- **Write brief summaries** of key events, including the *who*, *what*, *when* and *where*, and attach them to the correct dates.
- **Add images** that show key points. She can also use color to distinguish events.

Source: L. Zwier and G. Mathes, *Study Skills for Success*, University of Michigan Press.

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