

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School
Cumberland County Schools



September 2022

Give your teenager opportunities to sharpen thinking skills

In high school, students learn more than basic subject matter. They are also learning to think in complex ways. Your teen is developing:

- **Advanced reasoning skills.** These help students think about multiple possibilities and hypothetical situations.
- **Abstract thinking skills.** Abstract thinkers can consider intangible concepts, such as *justice*.
- **Metacognition.** This means students can think about *how* they are processing what they are learning and feeling.



To support your student's emerging thinking skills:

- **Exchange world views.** Ask about your teen's political ideas and spiritual beliefs and share your own. Withhold judgment.
- **Provide a willing ear.** Listen to your teen's concerns. If you hear "You wouldn't understand," suggest turning to a trusted family friend for advice.
- **Offer chances to have a say.** Ask your teen's opinion on family rules and consequences, for example.
- **Encourage involvement.** If your teen feels strongly about an issue, help discover ways to contribute and gain a deeper understanding.



Keep your teen's mental health in mind

Experts warn that world and national events in recent years have contributed to a mental health emergency for children and teens. Fortunately, supportive family and school relationships promote students' mental well-being.

To bolster mental health:

- **Foster a sense of control.** Allow your teen to manage responsibilities and make some decisions independently.
- **Build up physical health.** Help your teen find time for sleep and exercise. Both improve mood and learning ability.
- **Suggest setting aside 20 minutes** a day for mindful relaxation, such as writing in a journal or creating art.
- **Encourage your student** to connect with teachers, classmates and friends, online and in-person.
- **Contact a doctor** or counselor if you become concerned about your teen's state of mind.

Source: "AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health," AAP.org, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Promote pleasure reading

When researchers asked 15-year-olds in the United States about reading, more than half said they only do it when they have to. But it takes practice to develop reading skills and stamina. Reading for pleasure leads to more reading. To encourage it, emphasize that the choice of reading material is up to your teen.



Source: S. Sparks, "How to Nurture Lifelong Readers in a Digital Age," Education Week.

Share social media savvy

According to a recent survey, teens spend about 90 minutes a day scrolling, posting and sharing on social media. Colleges and employers look at students' social media activity, so encourage your teen to:

- **Review** and update privacy settings.
- **Think** before posting.
- **Delete** inappropriate posts.
- **Focus** on creating a positive reputation, by posting and sharing credible content about topics your student cares about.



Source: "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021" Common Sense Media.

Study skills improve results

Two things often happen when students lack effective study skills: They spend more time than they need to on schoolwork or they get frustrated and quit. To help your teen study effectively, share these strategies:

- **Eliminate distractions**, like unneeded screen devices, before starting to study.
- **Review class notes** each evening.
- **Schedule several** short study sessions over a few days, rather than one long one.
- **Vary topics.** After studying science formulas, your teen should study English or history before turning to math formulas.



How can I revive my teen's interest in school?

Q: My 10th grader has lost interest in school. The year has just started, and already my teen isn't turning in assignments. When I ask about them, I hear "I don't care if I pass or not." I'm afraid I will have a dropout on my hands. What can I do?



A: One of the challenges of recovery from the pandemic is how to reengage the many students who have disengaged in the past two years. Every teen is different, so the best way to begin is to figure out why your student has lost interest in school.

Ask some questions, such as: What is different in your teen's life than it was in middle school? Are the same people important to your student? Are the classes this year harder or easier than in the past? Your teen's teachers from last year may be able to provide some insight. A school counselor may also be able to steer your teen and your family to helpful resources.

It's important for your teen to be part of the conversation. Sit down together. Say that you are concerned because you care about your teen. Explain that even if your student doesn't care about school, you do. Together, decide on some specific goals for this year (make sure they are realistic!). Then focus on positive steps your teen can take. Making up every missed assignment may not be possible, but doing tonight's reading is. Each step your student takes can provide motivation to take another.

Parent Quiz

Are you preparing for a productive year?

Students do better in school when they establish positive habits at home. Are you providing the guidance and encouragement that will help your teen get the year off to a strong start? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ 1. **Have you helped** your teen set a regular time for studying and doing assignments?
- ___ 2. **Have you shown** your teen how to use calendars and to-do lists to stay on track to fulfill responsibilities?
- ___ 3. **Do you plan** one-on-one time with your teen?
- ___ 4. **Do you encourage** your teen to read something for pleasure every day?
- ___ 5. **Have you reviewed** your family rules with your teen? Make adjustments that reflect

your student's maturity and responsibility levels.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are promoting behavior that supports school success. For each no, try that idea.

"Success occurs when opportunity meets preparation."
—Zig Ziglar

Set a course for the future

Students in every year of high school can take steps to prepare for graduation and higher education. Here are just a few:

- **Freshman** can get involved in activities that have meaning for them and make a four-year plan of classes to take.
- **Sophomores** can research colleges that might be of interest, take virtual tours and learn about sources of financial aid.
- **Juniors** can make sure the classes they are taking meet both graduation and college admission requirements.
- **Seniors** can chart application deadlines and make a plan for meeting them.

Solve a discipline problem

Teens occasionally do things that make parents want to yell. But loud, harsh words won't get your point across to your teen—and they can be harmful. Research shows that harsh verbal discipline increases the risk of depression and academic troubles.

Instead, make it clear that since your teen created the problem, it's up to your teen to fix it. If your student earns a poor grade, for example, remain calm and ask, "How do you plan to improve?"

Source: R.F. Hentges and M. Wang, "Gender Differences in the Developmental Cascade From Harsh Parenting to Educational Attainment: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Child Development*.

Express clear expectations

Your expectations are an important guide and motivator for your teen in school. To make them clear from the start:

- **Take time to discuss** school and schoolwork every day.
- **Explain that your teen's** best effort makes you prouder than an easy A.
- **Ask your teen** to create routines for homework and studying. Show confidence in your teen's ability to get things done without reminders from you.



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