

Helping Students Learn[®]

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

HIGH SCHOOL



December 2025

Boost motivation by helping your teen develop a sense of purpose

Having a sense of purpose—about learning and life in general—is grounding for teens. Research shows that purpose inspires positive emotions in teens that support their mental health and bolster their motivation to succeed.

To foster a sense of purpose, encourage your teen to:

- **Set goals.** Discuss things your high schooler wants to achieve. Whether it is learning a language, passing a challenging required class or running a 5K, a personal goal gives your teen a reason to work hard and persist.
- **Think about the future.** Have your teen meet with a school counselor to discuss potential career options and plans for pursuing them. While it isn't necessary to decide on a career now, exploring options can provide direction and help your teen feel empowered to move forward.
- **Pursue a passion.** Suggest joining a school club or team, or finding a part-time job that will let your teen develop related skills and knowledge.
- **Be of service.** Help your teen find opportunities to volunteer in the community or work to further a cause of interest.



Source: A. Burrow and others, "Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence, Council Report No. 3," The National Scientific Council on Adolescence.



Help your teen use AI appropriately

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing how people work, communicate and learn. Knowing what it can and cannot do can help your teen recognize and analyze the data it provides—and use it to enhance learning.

Explain to your teen that AI:

- **Learns by analyzing** information provided by people. But AI systems can't always judge the accuracy of that information or provide additional data, so your teen may receive incorrect or incomplete answers to questions.
- **Is often programmed** to customize data for users, so it can present biased information. Your

teen should verify facts with multiple credible sources.

Students can use AI to learn more about class topics. Your teen might ask a chat bot to "explain the Pythagorean theorem," for example. But caution your teen that using it to write answers or papers is plagiarism.

Encourage your teen to research ways AI is used in career fields. Does working with AI interest your teen?

Talk about times to say 'no'

Most teens are still learning to manage their time responsibly. Emphasize to your teen that in order to be able to fulfill commitments, it's important to say *no* to:

- **Optional activities** that create schedule overload.
- **Excess recreational** media use. Challenge your teen to find ways to limit endless scrolling.



Search for key college facts

Students have many options for education after high school. One tool that can help your teen find schools or programs that might be a good fit is College Scorecard (collegescorecard.ed.gov). Users can sort data on schools in various ways to learn about:

- **Degree programs** and fields of study offered at different schools.
- **Graduation rates.**
- **Costs** and average student debt.

Hold your teen accountable

Accountable teens think ahead and consider how their actions will affect themselves and others. As a result, they also tend to work harder and achieve more in school. To instill accountability, make it clear you expect your teen to:

- **Keep promises.** People must know they can count on your teen.
- **Admit mistakes.** Everyone makes mistakes. Accountable people don't shrug them off. They admit them and try make amends.
- **Accept consequences.** Accountable students *don't* try avoid consequences by blaming others. They *do* try to learn from the experience and avoid repeating it.



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How can I convince my teen to put effort into reading?

Q: My ninth grader rushes through reading assignments just to finish them—and doesn't seem to remember anything afterwards. What can I suggest that will help?

A: In order to learn from reading, students must remember what they read. To make this easier, encourage your teen to take the time to:

- **Consider the purpose** of the reading material. Your teen should ask, "What does the author want me to get out of this?"
- **Decide that the material** is worth remembering. Even if the subject is not a favorite, your teen can decide, "I want to remember this because it will help me in school."
- **Concentrate.** Your teen should focus attention on the reading. Suggest setting a timer for 10 minutes and giving reading undivided attention until it rings. Your teen can also write a few questions before starting to read and then focus on finding the answers.
- **Look for the familiar.** While reading, your teen can think, "Does this remind me of anything I already know? If so, what?" It's much easier to remember something new when it connects to something familiar. Your teen can also consider how parts of the reading connect to one another.



Do you encourage working with teachers?

Students may not like strict, demanding teachers. But learning how to work with tough supervisors is a lesson that pays off in school and in the workplace. Are you helping your teen meet the challenge? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___ **1. Do you tell** your teen that working with all kinds of people is necessary in school and in life?

___ **2. Do you talk** about your teen's goals for the class?

___ **3. Do you help** your teen brainstorm ways to show interest in doing well—participating in class, attending help sessions, etc.?

___ **4. Do you say** that you think your teen is a capable student who can work hard and be successful in the class?

___ **5. Do you suggest** your child ask a school counselor for help resolving ongoing issues?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are equipping your teen to work productively with teachers. For each no, try that idea.

"Accept challenges, so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory."

—George S. Patton

Strengthen self-sufficiency

In adulthood, your teen will have to handle many things without your help. Practicing now helps teens develop responsible self-sufficiency—which helps in school and whatever comes next. To encourage it:

- **Allow your teen** to solve problems independently. Don't rush to the rescue unless it's a matter of safety.
- **Discuss the connection** between actions and their outcomes. Ask your teen to think about what could happen as a result of different choices.
- **Don't fix things** your teen has done poorly. Instead, ask, "How do you think you could do better next time?"

Offer math-solving tips

If your teen is stumped by a math problem, these strategies can help:



- **Try to solve** any part of it you can, even if you can't solve the whole thing.
- **Round off** the numbers and try to solve it that way. Then, your teen can go back to the original and try again.
- **Estimate.** After estimating an answer, your teen can work backward through the calculations and see how closely it fits.

Take anxiety out of tests

Teens worry about all sorts of things, but tests don't need to be one of them. To help your teen conquer test anxiety:

- **Focus on preparation.** Help your teen make and stick to a plan to study in short sessions spread out over several days.
- **Share ways to relax**, such as tensing and relaxing muscles from the toes on up.
- **Offer reassurance.** While you expect your teen's best effort, your love for your teen won't change, no matter the grade.

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