

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

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



March 2023

Vaping is on the rise again: Make the dangers clear to your teen

In a recent survey, 14 percent of high schoolers (more than 2.1 million teens) reported vaping recently, up from 11 percent. This is bad news—the nicotine in vapes, or e-cigarettes, is especially harmful for adolescents because their brains are still developing.

To reduce the chance that your teen will vape:

- **Look for opportunities** to discuss it—when you see people vaping in the media or in real life, while you're alone in the car together or doing chores side-by-side, etc.
- **Ask what your teen knows** and thinks about vaping. Does your teen know anyone who vapes?
- **Set expectations.** Make it clear that it's illegal for teens to buy vapes, that vaping is dangerous—and that it's against your family's rules. Talk about ways to say *no* if your student feels pressured to vape.
- **Explain that most vapes contain nicotine**, which is highly addictive. They also expose users to other potentially harmful chemicals and increase the risk that teens will smoke regular cigarettes in the future.

Be aware of signs that your teen is vaping, such as a candy-like odor, an unexplained cough, increased irritability or frequent throat-clearing. If your child is addicted to nicotine, talk to a doctor about options for treatment.

Source: M. Cooper and others, "Notes from the Field: E-cigarette Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2022," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control.



Suggest creating a study plan for tests

A high score on a test or exam may improve your teen's GPA and give a college application a boost. A low score could mean your student has to repeat the class. Whatever the test, your teen shouldn't walk in unprepared.

When a test is announced, encourage your teen to:

- **Determine what must** still be learned. It will take longer to prepare if your teen hasn't done the reading or related assignments.
- **Look at a calendar.** Students can't study during classes, sports practices or at work, or when
- **Review sample tests** if available to see what's expected.
- **Plan a recap.** The night before a test is not the time to learn new material. After a final review, your teen should get some sleep.

doing assignments or sleeping. Your teen can block those times out, then schedule study times.

Establish respect for rules

You may avoid a conflict with your teen by ignoring misbehavior. But it sets you up for a battle the next time you try to enforce a rule.

When adults are inconsistent, teens think rules are more like suggestions. They push back against them, because sometimes "forgetting" about a rule works. On the other hand, knowing that you will enforce rules every time can motivate your teen to comply—without an argument.

Share strategies with your teen for working in groups

Group projects can help students learn more and develop workplace skills like collaboration. For the best results, advise your teen to:

- **Choose partners** who want to do well, rather than unmotivated friends.
- **Set deadlines** that allow extra time for "disasters."
- **Urge all members** to speak up and participate so that one person doesn't take over.



Source: K. Eckart, "Group project? Taking turns, working with friends may improve grades," *ScienceDaily*.

Talk about ways to be kind

Studies show that people who are kind to others are happier, and that happy students tend to earn better grades. Encourage acts of kindness that show:

- **Consideration.** Your teen can take classmates' needs into account and participate fairly.
- **Compassion.** Your teen can smile and reach out to a student who seems upset.
- **Forgiveness.** Your teen can try to mend relationships instead of holding grudges.



Source: O. Curry and others, "Happy to Help?" *Open Science Framework*; V. Jones, "Because I'm Happy," *Harvard Graduate School of Education*.



How can I help my teen get past a college rejection?

Q: My senior had high hopes of going to a particular college. Decisions recently came out, and my teen didn't get in. But a good friend did, and now my teen is too upset to think about the schools that said "yes." How can I help?

A: College decision season is stressful. But one truth about higher education is that there is no such thing as the "only perfect school" for any student.

To help your teen move on:

- **Acknowledge the disappointment.** Your teen's feelings are real and understandable.
- **Provide perspective.** More kids are applying to more colleges than ever before. That makes it harder for students who apply to competitive colleges to get into their first-choice schools. Schools also look at more than grades when selecting students. Your teen's friend may have an unusual talent—bassoon-playing, sprinting, etc.—that fills a need.
- **Take another look** at the schools that offered admittance. Is a campus visit possible? Most schools have events for admitted students (some may also be online). Help your teen choose a school that feels like a good fit.

In a year, your teen can apply to be a transfer student at that dream school. But by then, it's likely the school your teen chooses now will feel like home.



Are you helping your teen learn to work with tough teachers?

Demanding teachers may not win student popularity contests. But learning how to work with tough taskmasters can help your teen in school and on the job. Are you helping your teen meet the challenge? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you explain** that your teen will have to work with all kinds of people in life?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** your teen's goals for the class? To do well, your teen will have to work with the teacher.
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about ways your teen can show interest in learning—class participation, going to office hours, etc.?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your teen to ask a school counselor for help resolving ongoing issues with a teacher?

- ___ **5. Do you affirm** that your teen is a capable student who works hard and can succeed?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen learn to navigate tricky relationships. For each no, try that idea.

"Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them."

—Ann Landers

Boost budget responsibility

Taking on increased responsibility is an important way teens train for adulthood. Budgeting tasks help your teen gain a critical life skill (and practice math at the same time). Have your teen:

- **Set a budget and stick to it.** This teaches teens to pay attention to spending. Your teen may even learn that adding to savings can be rewarding.
- **Plan a family project.** Ask your teen to research the steps to take and come up with a budget for your approval.

Questions promote integrity

Sometimes teens do things they know are wrong. Experts say teens can learn a lot about *integrity*—acting in accordance with personal values—from those times, but only if they think their choices through later. Help your teen do this by asking questions like:



- *What got in the way of telling the truth?*
- *Were you trying to impress someone else?*
- *Would you have acted differently if you had been with a different group of people?*

Source: M. Riera, *Staying Connected to Your Teenager*, Da Capo Lifelong Books.

It's smart to explore the arts

Recent research with teens links participation in arts activities to better self-control and less antisocial and criminal behavior.

There are many free or low-cost ways to expose your student to the arts. Encourage your teen to choose electives and clubs like chorus, band, drama, art or dance. Suggest trying a hobby, such as playing ukulele or painting. As a family, visit museums on free-admission days and look for free community concerts to attend.

Source: "Arts Activities May Improve Self-Control and Reduce Antisocial Behavior Among Teenagers," Neuroscience News.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com