

Helping Students Learn[®]

HIGH SCHOOL

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



January 2024

Teach your high schooler how to avoid common study mistakes

Students don't always know how to make the most of their study time. Discuss these common study traps—and ways to avoid them—with your teen:



- **Not knowing** where to begin. At the start of each study session, your teen should make a list of the tasks that need to be completed that day. Then it's time to prioritize. Which are the most important? Your teen should do those things first.
- **Reading without remembering.** Help your teen learn how to read actively. This involves making a list of questions about the topic before beginning to read. Then while reading, your teen can look for the answers. After reading, your student should try to restate the answers.
- **Assuming understanding.** Instead of moving on after doing an assignment, your teen should pause for a short self-quiz. Suggest making up questions a teacher might ask about the topic, then trying to answer them.
- **Reading lying down.** For many teens, it doesn't take long at all for reading lying down to turn into sleeping.
- **Studying all night.** Cramming doesn't work. Learning things in shorter sessions spaced out over time is the best way to remember them.

Help your teen set learning resolutions that stick

The secret to sticking with resolutions is to resolve to do specific things, rather than just to "do better." For a bright 2024, encourage your teen to set learning resolutions that involve specific actions, such as:

- **I will ask** at least one informed question in every class. To do this, your teen will have to pay attention.
- **I will review** my class notes every night before bed.
- **I will begin** working on projects on the day they are assigned.



Reading is a winning move

Practice is as critical to building reading skills as it is to developing sports skills. If your teen loves sports, reading about athletic heroes is a chance to do both. Encourage your teen to try a biography of an all-star in a favorite sport.



Suggest directions for thinking

To evaluate a plan, idea or choice, your teen needs to think it through. One four-step method matches things to think about with points on a compass:

1. **EAST = Excited.** When choosing a topic for an essay about a personal experience, for example, your teen can ask, "What excites me about this experience?" This can help your teen choose a topic that's interesting to write about.
2. **WEST = Worrisome.** What concerns your teen about the chosen topic? Your teen might worry it's not impressive or unusual enough.
3. **NORTH = Needs.** What would help your teen evaluate the topic?

Your student might read essays online about others' experiences and think about what makes them compelling—even if the experiences seem ordinary.

4. **SOUTH = Stance.** Now your teen can take a position: "Moving to a new town is common, but we moved during the pandemic and I didn't meet my new classmates in person for a whole year."

Source: "Compass Points," Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Use praise that motivates

Praise can improve your communication with your teen—and encourage your teen to keep making positive choices. For results:

- **Focus on actions.** Instead of saying "Wow!" for a top grade, say, "You've been working hard. You earned it!"
- **Make it a conversation.** When your teen does something well in school, say things like, "I want to hear all about it!"
- **Help your teen reflect** on the good feelings that come from success. "You must be so proud of landing that job. What was the best part of the interview?"

Sources: "Essentials for parenting teens: Praising your teen," Centers for Disease Control; "What to say instead of 'I'm proud of you,'" Edutopia.



My teen doesn't talk about school issues. What can I do?

Q: My 10th grader would make a great secret agent. When it comes to problems at school, my teen's lips are sealed. Last year, my teen kept failing grades in math a secret until it was almost too late to do anything about it. How can I get my student to tell me about things that matter?

A: When students get to high school, it isn't always easy to get them to talk about their classes. But you are right to try. Talking about school is important for you and your teen.

One solution to improve communication may be to get your teen to open up about things that are less important. Do a household project together. Take your teen for a drive or on a walk. When you are both focused on another task, conversation may come more easily. Talk about everyday things, and try to do at least as much listening as talking. Let your teen take the lead in the conversation.

Teens don't always have the best judgment about what families need to know. You'll also need to communicate with the school. Is there an online grade book you can monitor? You can also contact your teen's teachers or counselor to ask about your teen's progress or discuss concerns. Your teen may never reveal some secrets, but you can find out what you need to know.



Are you promoting single-tasking?

Teens love to multitask. But studies show that multitasking is distracting. So your teen may be doing many things, but doing none of them well. Are you helping your teen concentrate on the task at hand? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you have** your student turn off TVs, phones and other devices not needed for assignments during study time?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your teen prioritize tasks and plan enough time to do them?
- ___ **3. Do you check** sometimes to see how many things your teen is doing while studying?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** activities that build concentration, such as reading?
- ___ **5. Do you set** an example by focusing on one thing at a time?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen strengthen powers of concentration. For each no, try that idea.

"Success demands singleness of purpose."
—Vince Lombardi

Build goal-reaching skills

Reaching long-term goals takes planning and persistence. To foster these skills:



- **Mention challenging things** your teen has learned how to do that have taken time and effort to master.
- **Discuss time management.** Help your teen break big projects down into smaller tasks with individual deadlines.
- **Teach financial planning.** How much does that "gotta-have-it" item cost? Help your teen calculate the time it would take to afford it by saving at different rates.

Help prevent cyberbullying

Research shows that teens who see their families as loving and supportive are less likely to engage in cyberbullying. Teens can also help stop it. Have your student:

- **Delete mean or hurtful comments** on your teen's own social media posts.
- **Unfollow or block users** who repeatedly post negative things about others.
- **Spread the word** among friends that bullying is uncool and agree not to do it.

Source: New York University, "Teens who think their parents are loving are less likely to be cyberbullies," ScienceDaily.

Construct a memory palace

Does your teen have material to memorize? Suggest making a memory palace. This strategy works best when students are familiar with the material, but need a way to recall it easily. Share the process with your teen:

- 1. Make a mental map** of your home.
- 2. Picture each fact** or item to be memorized in a different area in the home.
- 3. Take a mental walk** through the home to recall each piece of material.

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

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