

High School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Emphasize attendance and help your teen stay focused

Winter break is right around the corner, and your teen can't stop talking about how excited she is. But is she ready to buckle down and give her best efforts these last few weeks?

The weeks leading up to winter break are just as important as any other time of the school year. Even though your teen may find it hard to get out of a warm bed in the morning, she still has to wake up and go to school.

Here are a few tips to help you keep your teen on track:

- **Evaluate** how her attendance has been over the first half of the school year. Is your teen arriving to school on time every day, ready to learn? Is she going to *all* of her classes? If not, help her set some attendance goals for the rest of the school year.
- **Ask questions** about what she's doing in school. What is she learning in her English class? How is her history project going? Does she have assignments that she'll need to work on over winter break?
- **Encourage her** to make a checklist of everything she still has to do for school and extracurricular activities. This will help her stay organized in the busy weeks leading up to break.
- **Remind her** that school is her most important job. You can't get out of work one day just because it's close to the holidays; likewise, she can't miss school.

Find ways to spend time with your teen



Ask teens what they'd really like and you may be surprised at the answer. According

to one study, one in four teens wants to spend *more* time with parents. And most of the others say they're happy to spend time with their folks.

Here are some things teens say they'd like to do:

- **Enjoy simple activities.** They don't need a plan for how they'll spend time with you. Teens just want to take a walk, prepare a meal or read a book together.
- **Learn more about their family.** Sharing family stories is a terrific way to pass on family traditions and bring history to life for your teen.
- **Get it on the schedule.** If you're busy, teens understand that they're a priority if they see an appointment with you on the calendar.
- **Unplug.** To make the most of your time together, make a pact to turn off cell phones, computers and the television.

Source: "Surprise! Teens Want Time With Parents," Connect with Kids Education Network, niscw.com/high_connect.

Focus on effort by fostering your teen's long-term thinking



Teens can be impulsive. They often react quickly and, for many, thinking long-term can be a challenge. Yet the most important things in life require effort and persistence.

Here are three ways you can foster long-term thinking:

- 1. When your teen is frustrated** because he can't figure something out right away, teach him about the value of persistence. Remind him that most of the things he has learned—from riding a bike to driving a car—have taken time.
- 2. When your teen talks** about a big project for school, teach him about time management. Help him break it down into smaller

steps with individual deadlines—working backwards from the due date until today.

- 3. When your teen shows** you the latest gotta-have-it fashion or electronic device, teach him about financial planning. How much does it cost? How can he save money for it? Help him create a plan to get what he wants.

Source: W. Sears, M.D. and M. Sears, R.N., *The Successful Child: What Parents Can Do to Help Kids Turn Out Well*, Little, Brown and Company.

“Good habits formed at youth make all the difference.”

—Aristotle

Find exciting ways to encourage reading over the winter break



Just because she's out of school for a few weeks doesn't mean your teen can stop reading. With some time off from textbooks and research papers, winter break is the perfect time to encourage your teen to pick up a book—just for the fun of it!

To promote reading while your teen is on winter break, you can:

- **Ask her to read** at least one book for pleasure. Visit the library and encourage your teen to wander the stacks until she finds a book she's interested in reading. If she has a hard time finding one, have her talk to the librarian.
- **Play word games as a family.** Play board games, like Scrabble or Boggle. Pick a long word and see who can make the most words from the letters in it. You can also challenge your teen to invent a game based on words and reading.
- **Suggest a place to volunteer.** Encourage your teen to call a local nursing home or day care and see if they need anyone to read aloud. She can also see if the staff at the local library needs help shelving books.
- **Have family discussions** about books. Have everyone in the family read the same book, and ask your teen to lead an informal chat about it.
- **Watch a movie** that is based on a book—as long as your teen reads the book first! Talk about how the two are similar or different. How did the depiction of the characters in the movie differ from how your teen imagined them?

Does your teen work well with teachers?



It's normal for teens to like some teachers better than others. Learning to get along with authority figures is an important life lesson. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if your teen is working well with his teachers:

- 1. Do you remind your teen** of his responsibility for relationships with his teachers? He should always be courteous and respectful.
- 2. Do you help your teen** keep things in perspective? He doesn't have to like a teacher to learn something in that class.
- 3. Do you help your teen** figure out what is causing the problem if he is having trouble in a class?
- 4. Do you encourage your teen** to work with his teachers on his own to resolve any issues?
- 5. Do you ask to speak** to a teacher if a problem becomes overwhelming for your teen?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're helping your teen learn how to work with teachers. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Take advantage of the winter break to prepare for college



It is never too early for your high schooler to start thinking about college applications. And winter break can

be a productive time for all teens to think about their futures.

Here are some guidelines:

- **A freshman or sophomore** can use this time to start looking at college websites and brochures. If he has an idea of what he would like to study in college, he can focus on schools with strong programs in that area. Your teen can also review the admittance requirements for his potential course of study. That way, he can work with his counselor in the spring to make sure he takes the appropriate classes in high school.

- **A junior** can narrow down the list of colleges he'd like to visit. Many colleges have open houses in the spring. Make travel plans now, if necessary—planning early often means getting the best prices. You might also suggest your teen write a practice college application essay or update his résumé.
- **A senior** should be wrapping up his college applications—many are due in January. Remind him to make copies of his applications before he sends them, so he's not starting from scratch if one gets lost in the mail or if the file doesn't go through. And be sure to celebrate when he has completed all his applications!

Source: "Applying to College: FAQs," BigFuture, The College Board, niswc.com/high_college.

Community service should be a year-round priority for teens



Educators know that community service has significant academic benefits for students.

It gives students an opportunity to apply what they've learned to real human needs.

Volunteering also helps students gain valuable life experience and skills—which can put them on the path to their future careers.

Ask your teen to research and select an organization that your family can help. As a family you could:

- **Support an organization.** Some families give a monetary gift to a charity they support. But that isn't the only way to help. Find out if you can collect old blankets

and bring them to an animal shelter. Could you organize a collection of canned goods for a food pantry? Would your local hospital accept a donation of gently-used books or movies?

- **Prepare and serve a meal.** A local soup kitchen or homeless shelter may need volunteers to prepare and serve a meal.
- **Give the gift of time.** Is there a nursing home nearby? Ask if there are any residents who do not have regular visitors.
- **Give a gift anonymously.** Perhaps your teen knows someone who is going through a rough time. Leaving a small plant or a batch of cookies at their doorstep could lift that person's spirits.

Q: My daughter has come down with a serious case of "senior slump." Unfortunately, it's only the first semester of her sophomore year! She's stopped doing homework, according to her teachers. She just doesn't seem to care whether she passes or not. How can I get things turned around so that she actually makes it to her senior year?

Questions & Answers

A: Right now, your teen is putting a lot of energy into *not* caring. The challenge is to get her to apply that energy to doing something productive.

Here are four time-tested steps you can take:

1. **Think about what's different.** Does she have a new group of friends? Did she enroll in more (or less) challenging courses this year?
2. **Talk with her teachers** about what they're seeing. If there are teachers, counselors or coaches who knew her last year, seek their input as well.
3. **Talk with your daughter** about her progress in school. Tell her that even if she doesn't care about school, you do. Relationships matter with teens.
4. **Set deadlines** and specific goals with your teen. She may be feeling overwhelmed, so help her focus on specific positive steps she can take. She may not be able to raise her English grade this marking period, but she can read the novel the teacher assigned. She can do her math homework every day. Each positive step will motivate her to try a little harder.

It Matters: Building Character

Empower your teen to combat cyberbullying



High schoolers spend much of their time texting their friends and sharing posts on social networking sites

such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Not surprisingly, these are the channels that many bullies use to harass other students. Studies show that 70% of students see frequent bullying online.

Whether it's a mean comment posted on an Instagram photo or a rumor that's been retweeted several times, cyberbullying can have a devastating effect on students' self-esteem and academic performance.

Teens can play an important role in defeating cyberbullies. Here are four simple steps your teen should take. She should:

1. **Delete messages** or comments posted on her page that are mean-spirited or make fun of others. She should not share negative messages or comments with friends. Bullying escalates when others help spread the message.
2. **Unfollow or block users** who consistently post harmful or negative things about others.
3. **Report bullying** to a trusted adult. Teens often operate under a code of silence. But telling a trusted adult can help bring the situation to an end.
4. **Talk with other students.** Your teen should let her classmates know that she thinks bullying is uncool and unacceptable.

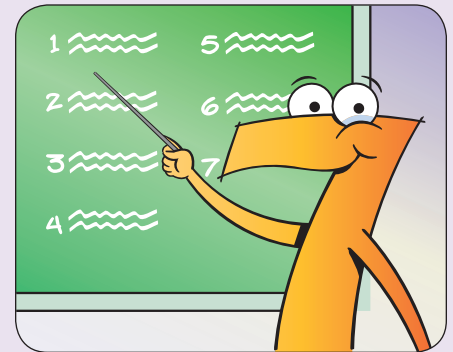
Source: "11 Facts About Cyber Bullying," DoSomething.org, niswc.com/high_cyberbully.

A seven-step process helps parents teach values to teens

Teachers want students who are responsible, respectful and compassionate. And parents want their kids to grow up with strong values. But how can you *teach* values to your teen?

Try this seven-step process:

1. **Explain.** Talk with your teen about the values that are important to your family.
2. **Examine.** Look for stories in the news that demonstrate values in action. Watch a TV show with your teen and discuss characters who do—and do not—display certain values.
3. **Exhibit.** Values are more *caught* than *taught*. If you want your teen to be honest, you need to be honest yourself.
4. **Expect.** Let your teen know that you expect him to demonstrate your family's values.
5. **Experience.** If you want your teen to be compassionate, give



him experiences where he can put that value into practice.

6. **Encourage.** When you see your teen demonstrating one of your family values, name it. "Thanks for being honest and showing me your math test grade."
7. **Evaluate.** Talk about times when it's hard to put your values into practice. Together, brainstorm ways to handle these situations.

Source: T. Lickona, *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*, Touchstone Books.

Gratitude is linked to academic success and satisfaction in life



A study of 1,035 high school students found that teens who were grateful experienced greater satisfaction in life and higher academic performance.

Encourage gratitude in your teen by helping her establish a time every day to think about all the things she is thankful for in her life.

She could take a few minutes to write in a gratitude journal before

she goes to sleep at night. This gives her a permanent record of the many good things in her life and builds her writing skills, too.

The journal can then become an action list. If your teen realizes that she's grateful for having a funny history teacher, she might decide to sign up for another one of his classes next year.

Source: J.J. Froh and others, "Gratitude and the Reduced Costs of Materialism in Adolescents," *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Springer International Publishing AG.