

High School Parents[®]

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Shelton Youth Service Bureau

still make the difference!



It's time for your teen to get organized for final exams

There's probably only one thought on your teen's mind right now: summer! So remind her that final exams stand between her and that nice, long break. And she'll do herself a favor if she starts preparing for those exams sooner rather than later.

To get a jump start, encourage your teen to:

- **Talk with teachers.** Many teachers will offer hints about what to focus on when studying. A comment like, "Remember how often we referred to the concepts in Chapter 6," means your teen should give it her attention.
- **Organize class materials.** Finals are all about review. Your teen will be ahead if she makes sure she has her notes, tests and

homework in one place, and in an order that makes sense to her.

- **Create a study plan.** Most tests require serious study and practice applying concepts. Encourage your teen to use a calendar to block out study time and schedule the other things she needs to do before the end of the school year.
- **Stock up on materials.** Ask her what she needs for studying—dry erase board, index cards, sticky notes, highlighters. She should replenish her supplies now if she's running low.

Don't forget to do your part to help your teen get ready for those final exams! Minimize distractions while she studies, and make sure she gets a good night's sleep the night before tests.

Listen to your teen's ideas and opinions



"Could you please hear me out?" You've probably asked that question yourself in a dis-

ussion at work or with a family member. Even if you don't get your way, you want to know your point of view is being considered.

It should come as no surprise that teens feel the same way. Giving them a chance to express their opinions makes them happier, more engaged and more confident.

When your teen has something to say, take time to listen to him. And when he makes a valid point, seriously consider it. For example, he might have a reasonable idea about switching up his chores. Or, he may have a compelling argument for staying up a bit later on Friday night.

You may not always agree with your teen, but by hearing him out, you are demonstrating respect—and building his confidence to speak up and contribute in all areas of his life.

Source: K.N. Marbell-Pierre and others, "Parental Autonomy Support in Two Cultures: The Moderating Effects of Adolescents' Self-Construals," *Child Development*.

Show your high schooler how to become self-sufficient



The next stage in life for your teen is adulthood—and that will require him to take care of himself. Developing self-sufficiency now will help him when he heads off to college or enters the workforce. It can also boost responsibility as he finishes high school.

To promote self-sufficiency:

- **Emphasize choices** and results. Before your teen acts, encourage him to think about what could happen as a result of his decisions.
- **Applaud your teen** when he makes a good decision. When he doesn't, ask what he learned.
- **Don't rescue your teen** unless it's a matter of safety. Let him learn from the consequences of his actions.

- **Don't solve your teen's problems.** He knew he wanted to buy that new video game, but he spent all of his money. He won't learn to rely on himself if you buy it for him.
- **Don't redo his work.** Your teen's English paper may not be as organized as you think it should be, but don't offer to "fix" it.

"Put your heart, mind, and soul into even your smallest acts. This is the secret of success."

—Swami Sivananda

Be alert for patterns when investigating substance abuse



When a teen is abusing alcohol and drugs, a pattern of signs typically occurs. Unfortunately, parents don't always see the signs for what they are—until they are faced with a serious problem.

Substance abuse can be a life-or-death issue. You should suspect substance abuse, or the risk of it, if you see several of the following signs:

- **Social issues.** If your teen feels she has no friends, if she is very down on herself, or if she starts hanging around peers who behave recklessly, she could be at risk.
- **Sudden academic problems.** There are many reasons for a big drop in grades. But if it happens along with other signs of substance

abuse, it could be part of a dangerous pattern.

- **Leaving evidence.** Things like empty beer cans and rolling papers don't just appear. If you find them, it is likely your teen knows exactly how they got there. It is also likely that she used them herself.
- **Not caring.** Teens involved in drugs or alcohol eventually start ignoring what was once important: concern for what parents think, for what non-using peers do, and for their own appearance.
- **Unusual events** related to money. Drugs and alcohol cost money. Teens sometimes take money from their homes to support their behavior. On the other hand, a teen who suddenly has more money than usual may be selling drugs.

Are you staying involved in your teen's life?



Teens can be secretive creatures. But staying involved in a teen's life supports school success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are doing everything you can to keep the lines of communication open with your teen:

___ **1. Do you expect** your teen to tell you where he is? If he goes out with friends and his plans change, he knows to call and tell you where he will be.

___ **2. Do you spend** some time each day with your teen—even if it's in the car, preparing dinner or watching a show? These are times when communication happens most naturally.

___ **3. Do you share stories** with your teen about silly or memorable things he did when he was younger?

___ **4. Do you plan** activities for you and your teen to do together—whether it's a household project or a special outing?

___ **5. Are you available** to talk when your teen comes to you with a problem?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're doing a good job of creating ways for your teen to keep in touch. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Summer is a great time for rising seniors to work on college essays



For many students, senior year means it's time for college applications. Students can reduce the stress

of the application process by getting their essays written during the summer before their senior year.

Share these four tips from college admissions officers on how to write great application essays:

- 1. Start early.** More than 900 colleges now use the Common Application. Encourage your teen to visit www.commonapp.org and check out the 2021 application essay prompts. There is even an app, so your teen can work on the go!
- 2. Be yourself.** The college essay is a good way for a college to get to know your teen. But it's important that his essay show who he really is, not who he thinks the college would like him to be. If he doesn't

sit around discussing philosophy, then he shouldn't write an essay about it. If you're tempted to write the essay for him, don't. Admissions committees know what teens sound like—and that's who they want to hear from.

- 3. Tell a story.** Every teen has a story to tell, and the college essay can be the place to tell it. Be creative. One student wrote a great essay about reading the morning announcements at school!
- 4. Write.** Edit. Rewrite. Repeat. A solid essay takes time. It's not something that can be dashed off the night before the application is due. So encourage your teen to write a few drafts during the summer. That way, he'll have a polished draft ready to show to a trusted teacher for feedback when school starts in the fall.

Source: A. Pannoni, "Top College Officials Share Notes on Great Application Essays," *US News and World Report*.

Build your teen's character with a positive volunteer experience



To build your teen's character, encourage her to take some time to volunteer. Teens who volunteer regularly:

- **Are less likely** to use drugs.
- **Are less likely** to be sexually active.
- **Are more likely** to develop a strong work ethic.
- **Are more likely** to be active participants in their communities as adults.
- **Gain important skills** and experiences that can be listed on college applications or résumés.

To help your high schooler have a positive volunteering experience:

- **Discuss her strengths** and interests. Help your teen find a cause she feels strongly about. Then, review her schedule. If she has a lot of free time over the summer, volunteering regularly may be right for her. If her schedule is pretty full, she could participate in a volunteer program from home (such as packing care packages to send to troops overseas).
- **Encourage her to stay committed.** Remind your teen that volunteering is a job—she has to show up when she says she will.

Source: S. Bhaskar, M.D., "Teaching teens to volunteer; the importance of community service," *ChildrensMD*.

Q: My 10th grader tries her best in her Spanish class. But she just isn't getting it. Her grades are low, and she may have to take the class again next year. What can a parent do when trying hard just isn't enough?

Questions & Answers

A: Life isn't always fair. Some kids can master a subject without much effort. Others work hard but still struggle.

That's no reason for your teen—or you—to give up. There are some things she can do differently that may help her be more successful.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Talk with the teacher.** Be sure she tells the teacher how much time she spends studying. What problems does the teacher see? What could your teen do differently? Where should your teen focus her efforts?
 - **Make a plan** based on the teacher's recommendations. For example, your teen could spend 20 minutes a day learning vocabulary words with flash cards. Later in the study session, she could work on conjugating verbs or reading comprehension.
 - **Review past lessons.** Have your teen work through old homework. When she hits a stumbling block, she may find out where her problem started.
 - **Get extra help.** Does the school have student tutors? Can the teacher recommend someone to work with your teen?
 - **Keep trying.** Acknowledge how hard your teen is working and let her know how proud you are. Don't let her give up.
- With a strong work ethic and your support, your teen will likely be able to improve her Spanish skills.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Use six strategies to encourage summer reading



Studies have long shown that when students read for pleasure they benefit academically. While

your teen may not *need* to read for school over the summer months, she should still spend some time reading.

To motivate your teen:

1. Focus on reading for pleasure.

The most important lesson your teen may learn over the summer is that there are things she *likes* to read. Whether it's pop fiction or news articles about her favorite athlete or even the Sunday comics, be sure she keeps reading.

2. Visit the library regularly—in person or online. Encourage her to browse through books and other reading material to see what catches her eye and her interest.

3. Connect on a different level.

Reading is a good way to let your teen know you are aware she is maturing. Look for an article on a more mature subject and discuss it with her. Or pass along a book you have enjoyed.

4. Listen to an audiobook in the car. This may spark your teen's interest and encourage her to download a book to listen to on her phone.

5. Read some books written for teens yourself. You may learn more about the things that are on your teen's mind. These books can also open the door to interesting conversations.

6. Set a good example. As with so many things, your example is a powerful teacher. So let your teen see you reading often.

Fill your teen's summer with engaging learning activities

Too many teens turn a summer off from school into a summer off from learning. It's OK to let your teen spend a week or so de-stressing from this unprecedented school year, but don't let this last all summer long.

Use the break to help your teen reinforce his skills in:

- **History.** If you're going on a trip this summer, ask your teen to do a little research on the area. He may be surprised to find out that a sleepy seaside town was once the hideout of a pirate captain.
- **Science.** Challenge your teen to plant a flower or vegetable garden. He'll learn about what plants need in order to grow—and might even be interested enough to look up the details on photosynthesis or how new varieties of plants are developed.
- **Writing.** Encourage your teen to keep a summer journal and to



write in it daily. Having “nothing to write about” because his days are “so boring” might encourage him to strike out on a learning adventure of his own.

Challenge your teen to follow healthy routines this summer



If they had it their way, some high schoolers would probably stay up until 2 a.m., sleep until noon, live on pizza and soda, and scroll through social media all day. Without the structure provided by school, many teens spend their summers exactly like that!

This summer, expect your teen to stick to a healthy routine. Make it easy by sharing the 9-5-2-1-0 initiative.

Experts suggest teens aim for the following each day:

- **9 hours** of sleep.
- **5 servings** of fruits and vegetables.
- **2 hours or less** of recreational screen time.
- **1 hour** of physical activity.
- **0** sugar-sweetened drinks.

By following the 9-5-2-1-0 initiative, your teen will be maintaining healthy habits and practicing self-discipline. After all, you're not always going to be watching to make sure she doesn't drink half her body weight in soda!

Source: “Health in the Balance: 9-5-2-1-0 for Health!” Community Health Solutions.