

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Shelton Youth Service Bureau

*still make the difference!*



## Empower your teenager to make responsible decisions

Your teen will have to make all kinds of decisions over the course of his high school career, from class selection to how to face difficult peer pressure. Help him learn to make decisions that will enable him to succeed both academically and socially.

When your teen has a choice to make, walk him through these steps:

1. **Ask him to describe** the situation he is facing. Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with just *yes* or *no*.
2. **Discuss possible options.** Help your teen brainstorm different alternatives. Encourage him to evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of every option. Talk through how different consequences could affect his goals.

3. **Allow your teen to make** a decision and carry it out. Later, ask him what he learned from making that choice. Ask if he would make the same—or a different—decision if faced with a similar problem in the future. Remember: While it may sometimes seem like your teen is challenging your values and beliefs, he still needs your support and guidance to make important decisions about his future. Teens often rebel as a way to assert their independence. But with your support and unconditional love, your teen will develop the judgment that will guide him to make responsible decisions.

**Source:** American Medical Association, "Helping Your Teen Make Responsible Choices," Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

## Help your teen build a strong vocabulary



A strong vocabulary will help your teen communicate her thoughts clearly and precisely. Your

teen may already be learning a list of specific vocabulary words in some of her classes.

To support that learning at home:

- **Use flash cards.** Being quizzed on words and their definitions might not be your teen's favorite activity, but it is effective—and a simple way for you to help her develop her recall. Just read the definition and have your teen provide the word. Or, read the word and ask her to name two synonyms.
- **Declare a Word of the Day.** Look at your teen's vocabulary list and choose a new word each day. Challenge family members to use this word in regular conversation.
- **Text your teen** a vocabulary word and its definition. Or just text her a word and ask her to text you the definition. Teens just can't seem to stay away from their phones, so texting is a great way to sneak in some learning.

# Motivate your teen to read by recommending specific books



According to a recent British survey, 27% of kids started reading more during the coronavirus lock down. How can

parents encourage their teens to continue this trend and keep reading?

Experts have found that teens are much more likely to do things when they are given specific instructions rather than general suggestions. Suggesting a specific book for your teen to read may be more effective than saying, “You should read more.” But with all the books out there, how do you know which one to recommend?

That’s where Goodreads comes in—the world’s largest website for readers and book recommendations. You can browse titles by category or check out

a list of the most popular young adult books, which is updated monthly. Goodreads even has an app you can download on your phone.

So before your teen heads to the library, take a look at [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com) and make a list of books she should look for.

Source: “Children and young people’s reading in 2020 before and during the COVID-19 lockdown,” *Annual Literacy Survey*, National Literacy Trust.

“Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are.”

—Mason Cooley

# Simple strategies can help you reinforce your teen’s learning



Reinforcing learning can be tricky when you are the parent of a high school student. Your teen may be learning a

high-level math. She may be up to her ears in chemistry or statistics. Or, she may be in a specialized career-training program. And you may not feel that you know enough about the subject to reinforce it.

However, what is really important is simply to create a family life that values learning and makes it possible. Here’s how:

- **Talk about the jobs** people hold whenever you visit a business with your teen. Discuss the education needed for such a job, but keep the conversation casual.
- **Encourage your teen** to research and explore. For example, ask her

to help you find out where to get a service you need or to find a new place for your family to visit.

- **Let your teen know** that you are interested in anything new she learns at school. Tell her you would love to have her explain some concepts to you.
- **Plan family projects** that involve learning skills, such as painting a wall or cooking a special meal, that you and your teen can do together.
- **Encourage your teen’s talents**, even if they are not what you would have picked. Let her know that you respect what she can do. Remember, these talents may become the foundation for her future career.
- **Ask for your teen’s opinions** on everything. Make sure she knows that you value her opinion—whether you agree with it or not.

# Are you helping your teen learn from mistakes?



Your teen is bound to make mistakes—everyone does. What’s important is what he does *after* he discovers he’s made a mistake.

Are you helping your teenager learn and grow from mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you avoid reacting** emotionally when your teen makes a mistake?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** your teen what lessons he can learn from his mistake?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you admit it** when you make a mistake and talk about what you’re going to do to fix it?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** to your teen about some of the important lessons you’ve learned from the mistakes you’ve made?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you tell** your teen to be kind to himself? Perfectionists have a tendency to overreact to mistakes.

## How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you’re helping your teen turn mistakes into learning opportunities. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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## A serious study group can help your teen prepare for tests



You may not be convinced it's wise if your teen announces that he is going over to a friend's house "to study."

However, studying with others can actually benefit teens.

A study group can allow your teen to share his strengths and bolster his weaknesses. It is also great practice for adulthood, when he may have to collaborate with others on projects.

The key is for your teen to form a study group in which the members *really* study. Share these tips:

- **Select members carefully.** This is a crucial part of forming an effective study group. Members should be serious about studying and want to do well in school. Teens with strong personal relationships may

not work well together in the same study group unless they are skilled at separating working from socializing.

- **Keep the group small.** Between four and six people works well.
- **Consider how to divide the work.** In a study group, each person usually handles one part of the material. It is helpful if members get assignments that play to their strengths. Then they can share more easily and explain their sections to the rest of the group.
- **Keep it professional.** Have a set day and time for meetings and stick to the schedule. Members may also want to pick a leader (rotate this position) for each meeting. Part of the leader's job is to keep the studying on track.

## Suggest creative ways your teen can strengthen writing skills



Help your teen build important writing skills by encouraging him to write often. It's the best way for him to improve.

To spark his interest, suggest fun writing activities such as these:

- **Start a family story.** Have your teen write the opening paragraph in a notebook, then pass it on to another family member to continue. Keep the cycle going so that everyone contributes to the story.
- **Invent "mad libs."** Have your teen write a two-paragraph story and replace 10 of the words with blank spaces. He should look up each missing word's part of speech and write it in the blank space. "Jake ran to the window and saw a (noun). It (verb) from the (adjective) tree and was never seen again!" Then he can ask family members to fill in the missing words to create a funny new tale.
- **Write letters.** Suggest that your teen write to a family member or friend who lives in a different town. Or he can write a fan letter to his favorite author, athlete or celebrity.
- **Keep a scrapbook.** As your teen stores photos, ticket stubs, notes from friends and other mementos, he can write a short paragraph describing what is on the page.
- **Write a family newsletter.** Give your teen the task of reporting on big events. He can conduct interviews, write articles and send out a newsletter to family members and friends.

**Q:** My teen is a junior and she doesn't have any idea about what she might like to do after high school. Many of her friends have an idea of careers they'd like to prepare for. How can I help my teen begin to focus her thinking?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** There are lots of teens who don't know what they want to do for a career—and that's OK. But you are wise to want your daughter to start thinking about her future.

To help her focus, ask a few questions:

- **What subjects** does she enjoy in school? Thinking about this may guide her to the types of jobs she'd like to explore.
- **What does she like to do** in her spare time? Does she like to read? Work with her hands? Spend time outdoors? Does she prefer to be with a group of friends or is she happier spending time with one or two people?
- **Can she get experience?** Could she spend a few days shadowing someone in a career that interests her? If she thinks healthcare is interesting, for example, could she volunteer at a hospital?

Be sure to ask the school about resources, too. The school counselor may have information that can help her narrow down her choices. A counselor should also be able to help your teen determine what type of degree or training she will need to achieve her career goals.

Avoid pushing your teen in a direction just because it's something you always wanted to do. Your job is to guide her toward opportunities for a future that is right for her.

# It Matters: Discipline

## How to support your teenager's changing needs



Your teen might not be able to explain why he's often moody—but science can. His brain is growing as

quickly now as it was during the first two years of his life. That partially explains why your teen will be laughing one minute and angry the next.

Experts agree that teens need their parents' support now more than ever. To meet your teen's changing needs so he can be successful in school, give him your:

- **Time.** Family time shows your teen that you care about him. He may claim he'll "die of embarrassment" if he's seen getting ice cream with the family, but deep down, he's thankful to be with you.
- **Encouragement.** Believe it or not, teens want—and need—parents' approval. Let your teen know that you are proud of him and that you believe he is capable of success.
- **Patience.** Teens are exploring a variety of things—new looks, new interests and new ideas. They're attempting to expand their horizons and navigate changes in the world. Be patient with your teen, discuss his new interests and choose your battles carefully.
- **Nurturing.** Make sure your teen knows how to make healthy food and exercise choices for his growing body. Nurture him emotionally by reminding him that you love him and will be there for him when he needs you.

**Source:** M. Barone, M.A., M.F.T., "Living and Learning with Teens," Homefires.

## A written discipline plan curbs arguments & misunderstandings

**T**eens who follow rules at home are more likely to follow rules at school, too. While some teens are cooperative and respectful, others resist rules and enjoy arguing over every point.

A written discipline plan (created before any misbehavior) reminds your teen of what she should be doing, and what will happen if she doesn't. It also eliminates the need to argue. You can point to the plan to show her exactly what you both agreed to.

To create an effective plan:

- **Keep it simple.** Too many rules will overwhelm both of you. Think of the top five issues that are most important to you. Post the rules and consequences for those.
- **Involve your teen.** A teen who needs a written discipline plan is also a teen who does not like to



give up control. Ask for her input about rules and consequences—but remind her that you have the final say.

- **Monitor progress.** When you notice that your teen is able to stay consistently within boundaries, it's time to review and possibly revise the plan.

## Don't fall into the trap of being your high schooler's friend



Your teen is growing up before your eyes and may look more like a young adult than a child. But remember:

He is still your child and not your peer. He needs you to be the parent—and you need him to respect you and your rules.

To avoid falling into the friend trap:

- **Require your teen** to be respectful to you and other adults. Don't continue a conversation with him if he is being rude. Walk away and

agree to talk to him when he is ready to speak respectfully.

- **Don't try to be the "cool parent"** in the neighborhood. You should be kind and caring to your teen and his friends, but you are not "one of the boys."
- **Do not make decisions** based on what would please your teen and his friends. They might like it if you paid for them all to see a horror movie, but is it a wise parenting choice? Trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.