

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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## Instill seven character traits to boost academic achievement

**S**tudies show that seven aspects of character lead to school success: *zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism* and *curiosity*. Students who possess these traits often succeed more than students who are equally as intelligent but don't display them.

To inspire:

1. **Zest**, show enthusiasm for what your teen is learning. "Wow, zebra fish can regrow their fins? That's really interesting!"
2. **Grit**, encourage persistence in the face of tough tasks. "I'm proud of how you stuck with your homework until you figured it out."
3. **Self-control**, assign meaningful responsibilities. Being able to complete tasks at home without being reminded will make it easier

for your teen to take responsibility for learning.

4. **Social intelligence**, suggest that your teen consider other's feelings. "Why do you think your classmate reacted like that?"
5. **Gratitude**, discourage comparisons with others. Instead, talk about the things your teen can feel grateful for.
6. **Optimism**, help your teen see the bright side of events. Meeting curfew may mean missing out on a late night with friends, but your teen will be well-rested to finish that big project.
7. **Curiosity**, suggest exploring subject matter in more depth. Encourage your teen to go to the library or research information online.

**Source:** P. Tough, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

## Attendance should always be top priority



Attendance can make the difference between graduating from high school and dropping out.

Educators talk about the importance of attendance, but that message is more effective when you support it at home.

To promote regular attendance:

- **Discuss the importance** of showing up on time—whether it's at school, a job or an appointment. Set a good example for your teen by always striving to be on time.
- **Don't make** staying home a treat. Consider making a "no screen time" rule on sick days. Your teen will be less likely to fake an illness just to get out of going to school. Make it clear that sickness means following up with the doctor.
- **Set a goal** and offer your teen a reward for reaching it. Start with a short-term goal at first—like perfect school attendance for an entire month. Then, decide on a reward. Even something as simple as a special lunch together can be a motivator.

## Show your teenager how to manage large school projects



Long-term projects often seem daunting to students. But with a bit of planning, your teen can conquer them.

To support your teen:

- **Have him mark** the project's due date on the calendar. Then have him work backwards, crossing out any days where he won't be able to work on the project. How much time is left for him to complete it?
- **Don't overreact**—no matter how little time your teen has to complete the project. Help him break the work down into smaller chunks. Encourage him to create deadlines for each part.
- **Offer assistance.** Of course you shouldn't do your teen's project for

him. But you can drive him to the store to get supplies, proofread him paper or listen to her presentation.

- **Provide motivation.** You'll be surprised at how helpful a simple "How's the project going?" or "I know you'll do a great job!" can be. Stick an inspiration quote or a note that says "Almost there!" on your teen's mirror.

**"Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it."**

—Lou Holtz

## Encourage your teenager to download free learning apps



High schoolers use their phones to send text messages, post pictures, check social media and play games. Sometimes, they

even use them to call people.

Why not encourage your teen to use his phone as a learning aid? There are countless free apps that can help him:

- **Study a foreign language.** Many apps will help students in their foreign language courses. Some apps focus on vocabulary. Others help students learn challenging verb tenses. Your teen should ask his teacher to recommend the best one for the language he is learning.
- **Graph math problems on the go.** In upper-level math classes, students often use graphing calculators to

solve problems. There are apps that will also do the job. Now your teen will be able to solve equations on his phone wherever he is.

- **Read Shakespeare.** Instead of lugging around a huge volume of Shakespeare's works, your teen can download whatever he's reading to his phone.
- **Brush up on geography.** There are even apps that can help your teen become familiar with the countries around the world.
- **Improve focus and memory.** Suggest your teen to look for apps that offer riddles, puzzles and brain teasers.
- **Manage time.** From to-do lists to digital calendars, many apps can help your teen keep track of schoolwork, activities and other responsibilities.

## Can your teen handle school & a part-time job?



Having a part-time job can help teens learn responsibility. But it can also overwhelm their ability to focus on

schoolwork. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if your teen is ready to balance school and a job:

- \_\_\_ **1. Does your teen show** that she can use time responsibly? Are you confident that she can think ahead and plan her time?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you agreed on** the number of hours your teen can work each week? Keep it under 20.
- \_\_\_ **3. Does your teen understand** that if her grades suffer, she will have to quit her job?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you and your teen** discussed how she will manage the money she earns?
- \_\_\_ **5. Does your teen have a plan** for how she will get back and forth to work without disrupting your entire family?

**How is your teen doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you and your teen are prepared for her to get a job. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# This research-based process can bolster your teen's writing



Writing is a key skill for success in nearly every subject, and is also a critical part of many college applications.

So how can you help your teen strengthen her writing skills?

Research shows that five steps help teens improve their writing:

1. **Prepare.** Your teen should spend time brainstorming and listing key points to include. Or, she can try writing for 10 minutes. This will help her figure out what she already knows about the topic.
2. **Research.** Your teen can search online, read newspaper articles, or get help at the library. Her research will deepen her understanding and make her writing more interesting.

3. **Make an outline.** Teens hate this step—but it works. Have your teen try different kinds of outlines. The traditional numbers-and-letters outline works well for some teens. Others prefer a tree or even a series of connected circles.
4. **Write more than one draft.** The first draft is the “down draft”—it’s the time for your teen to get her ideas down on paper. Once it’s finished, she should set it aside for a while. When your teen comes back to it, she may have ideas for how to clarify in the next draft.
5. **Proofread.** Your teen should read over her final draft and check for any spelling or grammatical errors.

**Source:** J. Unger and S. Fleischman, “Research Matters: Is Process Writing the ‘Write Stuff’?” *Educational Leadership*, ASCD.

# Too much stress can decrease your teen's learning potential



High school students often have a lot on their plates—and on their minds. They can easily become overwhelmed,

stressed and anxious. When their anxiety goes up, their grades can go down.

If your teen seems stressed out, help her find ways to relax. She could:

- **Enjoy time with a friend.** Suggest they do something that makes them laugh, such as watching a favorite funny movie or making a silly dance video.
- **Participate in a hobby** (other than playing games online). Focusing on an enjoyable activity reduces stress.
- **Stretch.** Doing yoga is linked to lower stress levels. Tell your child to try a few minutes of slow, gentle stretches.
- **Breathe deeply.** A short session of slow deep breathing can calm your teen when she is feeling overwhelmed. Practicing it for a brief time each day can lower her overall stress levels.
- **Take a power nap.** Sleep is vital for stress reduction. A short 15- to 30-minute nap in the afternoon can give your teen the boost she needs.
- **Write in a journal.** Writing can help your teen clarify her thoughts and feelings. It can also be a great tool for solving problems.
- **Listen to her favorite music.** Music can improve your teen's mood and help her release negative emotions.

**Q:** My son has disliked a few of his teachers before, but now he has one who seems especially hard for him to deal with. Everything my teen says about this teacher is negative. What should I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** When students are young, they usually adore their teachers. But as they get older, they may find there's a particular teacher they just don't like. That's especially true in middle and high school, where students have a different teacher for each subject.

As a parent, you may be tempted to rush to your teen's defense. But many experts say the best thing you can do is to help him learn to deal with the situation himself. Here's how:

- **Acknowledge his feelings.** Tell your teen that it's OK not to like a teacher. But it's important for him to learn how to work with people he doesn't like. Tell your teen you know he is capable of working things out.
- **Help him figure out** what is causing the problem. Does your teen have trouble understanding the content? Does he think the teacher is treating him differently than his classmates? As you listen, remember that you're only getting one side of the story.
- **Encourage action.** Once your teen is clear about the problem, he should talk with the teacher. A quick meeting is sometimes all it takes to clear the air and find solutions.
- **Monitor.** Keep watching and listening. Are things improving? If not, it may be time for you to meet with your teen and the teacher.

# It Matters: Social Emotional Learning

## Help your teen develop conflict resolution skills



Whether it's a fight with a friend, a misunderstanding with a teacher or an argument with a family member,

all teens experience conflict in their everyday lives.

Help your teen express his feelings in ways that lead to better relationships. Encourage him to:

- **Focus on the problem**, not the person. Your teen should avoid put-downs and name-calling. Teach him to use "I messages" to explain how he feels about the situation instead of "you messages" that blame the other person.
- **Listen to the other side.** Your teen should hear the other person out and try to understand their point of view—even if he doesn't agree with it.
- **Think before he acts** and try not to get defensive. Many times, a situation gets out of hand because people allow their emotions to control their actions.
- **Consider a compromise.** No one likes to lose. Your teen is more likely to resolve a conflict successfully if he looks for a solution where everyone gives a little and gets a little, too.
- **Ask for help** when he needs it. Sometimes it takes a mediator to resolve a conflict. A parent or teacher may be able to help.
- **Stand up for the rights of others** who may have been wronged in the conflict.
- **Be willing to apologize** when he is at fault. Saying "I'm sorry" is a sign of strength.

## Teach your teen how to show respect at home and at school

Teens often use slang and joke around with their friends. And more often than not, they slip into this habit when speaking to teachers or other adults—without realizing it may sound disrespectful.

Talk to your teen about the importance of being respectful to others. Tell her you expect her to show respect through:

- **The way she speaks.** Your teen should speak slowly, clearly and calmly. Encourage her to address people properly by saying, "Good morning, Mr. Jones" or using their titles, such as "Yes, Officer." And of course, saying *please* and *thank you* is always a great way to show respect.
- **Her body language.** When your teen smiles, nods and makes eye contact, she is showing people that she respects them. She should also



sit or stand up straight and avoid rolling her eyes.

- **Her overall attitude.** Your teen should avoid interrupting others. She should stay calm even when she disagrees with what someone is saying. Consideration for another person's thoughts and beliefs is a big sign of respect.

## Asking five questions helps teens make ethical decisions



Teenagers face many ethical dilemmas—from cheating and lying to "snitching" and experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Simply telling your teen to choose to do the right thing isn't enough.

A more effective approach is to discuss ethical choices your teen might face. Have your student put any decision through this five-question test:

1. **Am I making this choice** with the hope that no one will find out?

2. **What will I think** about my choice in a month? In a year?

3. **How could my choice** affect others? Would I want them to do the same to me?

4. **If [someone I admire]** were in the same situation, what would he/she do?

5. **If everyone did** what I'm about to do, would I want to live in the world shaped by that decision?

When teens think through ethical dilemmas before they occur, they will be more likely to make the right choice in the moment.