

# 10 Ways to Keep Your Teen on Track to Succeed in High School

Parents can play a vital role in helping teens succeed in school by being informed and lending a little support and guidance. Even though teens are seeking independence, parental involvement is an important ingredient for academic success.

## 1. Attend Back-to-School Night and Parent-Teacher Conferences

Teens do better in school when parents support their academic efforts. Attending your school's open house or back-to-school night is a great way to get to know your teen's teachers and their expectations. School administrators may discuss school-wide programs and policies, and post-high school options that parents and guardians of juniors and seniors need to know about.

Attending parent-teacher conferences is another way to stay informed, although in high school, staff usually set these up only when parental involvement is needed to address issues like behavior problems, falling below grade-level expectations, or alternatively, benefiting from advanced class work.

If your teen has special learning or behavioral needs, meetings can be scheduled with teachers and other school staff to consider setting up or revising individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 education plans, or gifted education plans.

Keep in mind that parents or guardians can request meetings with teachers, principals, school counselors, or other school staff any time during the school year.

## 2. Visit the School and Its Website

Knowing the physical layout of the school building and grounds can help you connect with your teen when you talk about the school day. It's good to know the location of the main office, school nurse, cafeteria, gym, athletic fields, auditorium, and special classes.

On the school website, you can find information about:

- the school calendar
- contacting school staff
- special events like dances and class trips
- testing dates

- sign-up information and schedules for sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities
- student resources for life after high school

Many teachers maintain their own websites that provide access to textbooks and other resources, and detail homework assignments, and test and quiz dates. Special resources for parents and students are also usually available on the district, school, or teacher websites.

### **3. Support Homework Expectations**

During the high school years, homework gets more intense and grades become critical for college plans. Students planning to attend college also need to prepare for the SATs and/or ACTs. Amid all these changes, many teens are learning how to balance academics with extracurricular activities, social lives, and jobs.

An important way to help is to make sure your teen has a quiet, well-lit, distraction-free place to study that's stocked with supplies. Distraction-free means no phone, TV, or websites other than homework-related resources. Be sure to check in from time to time to make sure that your teen hasn't gotten distracted.

Regularly sit down with your teen to go over class loads and make sure they're balanced, and help him or her stick to a homework and study schedule.

Encourage your teen to ask for help when it's needed. Most teachers are available for extra help before or after school, and also might be able to recommend other resources.

### **4. Send Your Teen to School Ready to Learn**

A nutritious breakfast fuels up teens and gets them ready for the day. In general, teens who eat breakfast have more energy and do better in school.

You can help boost your teen's attention span, concentration, and memory by providing breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, fiber, and protein, as well as low in added sugar. If your teen is running late some mornings, send along fresh fruit, nuts, yogurt, or a peanut butter and banana sandwich. Many schools provide nutritious breakfast options before the first bell.

Teens also need the right amount of sleep — about 8½ to 9½ hours each night — to be alert and ready to learn all day. But early school start times — on top of schedules packed with classes, homework, extracurricular activities, and friends — mean that it's common for teens to not get

enough sleep. Lack of sleep is linked to decreased attentiveness, decreased short-term memory, inconsistent performance, and delayed response time.

Most teens also experience a change in their sleep patterns, with their bodies telling them to stay up later at night and wake up later in the morning. As a result, many try to catch up on sleep on weekends. Ideally, teens should try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning. You can help by reminding your teen before bedtime to turn off the phone and limit video games and TV.

## **5. Instill Organizational Skills**

Learning and mastering the skills of getting organized, staying focused, and seeing work through to the end will help teens in just about everything they do. But this is not usually explicitly taught in high school, so teens can benefit from some parental guidance with organization and time-management skills.

Parents and guardians can help teens keep assignments and class information together in binders, notebooks, or folders that are organized by subject. Creating a calendar will help teens recognize upcoming deadlines and plan their time accordingly. Don't forget to have your teen include non-academic commitments on the calendar, too.

It also helps for teens to make prioritized daily to-do lists, and to study and do homework in a well-lit, quiet, orderly workspace. You can remind your teen that when it comes to studying and homework, multitasking is a time-waster. Working in an environment free of distractions like TV and texts works best.

## **6. Offer Help With Studying**

Planning is key for helping your teen study while juggling assignments in multiple subjects. Since grades really count in high school, planning for studying is crucial for success, particularly when your teen's time is taken up with extracurricular activities.

When there's a lot to study, help your teen to break down tasks into smaller chunks and stick to the studying calendar schedule so he or she isn't studying for multiple tests all in one night. Remind your teen to take notes in class, organize them by subject, and review them at home.

If grades are good, your teen may not need help studying. If grades begin to slip, however, it may be time to step in.

You can help your teen review material and study with several techniques, like simple questioning, asking to provide the missing word, and creating practice tests. The more processes the brain uses to handle information — such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening — the more likely the information will be retained. Repeating words, re-reading passages aloud, re-writing notes, or visualizing or drawing information all help the brain retain data.

Even if your teen is just re-reading notes, offer to quiz him or her, focusing on any facts or ideas that are proving troublesome. Encourage your teen to do practice problems in math or science. If the material is beyond your abilities, recommend seeking help from a classmate or the teacher, or consider connecting with a tutor (some schools have free peer-to-peer tutoring programs).

And remember that getting a good night's sleep is smarter than cramming. Recent studies show that students who sacrifice sleep to study are more likely to struggle on tests the next day.

## **7. Know the Disciplinary and Bullying Policies**

All schools have rules and consequences for student behaviors. Schools usually cite disciplinary policies (sometimes called the student code of conduct) in student handbooks. The rules usually cover expectations, and consequences for not meeting the expectations, for things like student behavior, dress codes, use of electronic devices, and acceptable language.

The policies may include details about attendance, vandalism, cheating, fighting, and weapons. Many schools also have specific policies about bullying. It's helpful to know the school's definition of bullying, consequences for bullies, support for victims, and procedures for reporting bullying.

It's important for your teen to know what's expected at school and that you'll support the school's consequences when expectations aren't met. It's easiest for students when school expectations match the ones at home, so they see both environments as safe and caring places that work together as a team.

It's also important to note that educators may call law enforcement officials to the school for serious infractions, and consequences may differ based on students' ages.

## **8. Get Involved**

Volunteering at the high school is a great way to show you're interested in your teen's education.

Keep in mind, though, that while some teens like to see their parents at school or school events, others may feel embarrassed by their parents' presence. Follow your teen's cues to determine how much interaction works for both of you, and whether your volunteering should stay behind the scenes. Make it clear that you aren't there to spy — you're just trying to help out the school community.

Parents and guardians can get involved by:

- serving as a grade-level chairperson
- organizing and/or working at fundraising activities and other special events, like bake sales, car washes, and book fairs, or working at a concession stand at athletic events
- chaperoning field trips, dances, and proms
- attending school board meetings
- joining the school's parent-teacher group
- working as a library assistant
- mentoring or tutoring students
- reading a story to the class
- giving a talk for career day
- attending school concerts, plays, and athletic events

Check the school or school district website to find volunteer opportunities that fit your schedule. Even giving a few hours during the school year can make an impression on your teen.

## **9. Take Attendance Seriously**

Teens should take a sick day if they have a fever, are nauseated, vomiting, or have diarrhea. Otherwise, it's important that they arrive at school on time every day, because having to catch up with class work, projects, tests, and homework can be stressful and interfere with learning.

Teens may have many reasons for not wanting to go to school — bullies, difficult assignments, low grades, social problems, or issues with classmates or teachers. Talk with your teen — and then perhaps with an administrator or school counselor — to find out more about what's causing any anxiety.

Students also may be late to school due to sleep problems. Keeping your teen on a consistent daily sleep schedule can help avoid tiredness and tardiness.

For teens who have a chronic health issue, educators will work with the families and may limit workloads or assignments so students can stay on track.

## **10. Make Time to Talk About School**

Because many teens spend so much of the day outside the home — at school, extracurricular activities, jobs, or with peers — staying connected with them can be challenging for parents and guardians. While activities at school, new interests, and expanding social circles are central to the lives of high school students, parents and guardians are still their anchors for providing love, guidance, and support.

Make efforts to talk with your teen every day, so he or she knows that what goes on at school is important to you. When teens know their parents are interested in their academic lives, they'll take school seriously as well.

Because communication is a two-way street, the way you talk and listen to your teen can influence how well he or she listens and responds. It's important to listen carefully, make eye contact, and avoid multitasking while you chat. Remember to talk *with* your teen, not *at* him or her. Be sure to ask open-ended questions that go beyond "yes" or "no" answers.

Besides during family meals, good times to talk include car trips (though eye contact isn't needed here, of course), walking the dog, preparing meals, or standing in line at a store.

When teens know they can talk openly with their parents, the challenges of high school can be easier to face.