

High School Parents[®]

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Bloomington High School

still make the difference!



Research shows 'interleaving' is effective for learning

When most high school students sit down to study, they take it one subject at a time. They do math until it's finished. Then they move on to Spanish, then history.

This technique is called *blocked practice*. But new research on how our brains learn shows it is less effective than a technique called *interleaving*. Students mix (or interleave) several subjects or topics while they are doing their homework. Instead of AAA-BBB-CCC, they do ABC-ABC-ABC.

Here's how to put interleaving to work: Instead of doing 20 math problems, have your teen do seven or eight, then move to a different subject. After changing subjects, students have to work a little harder to remember what they know. ("What is the Spanish

word for to try?") That will actually help your teen recall the material the next time it's needed. After all, long-term retention is the goal of any study session.

It's important that students don't just use interleaving as an excuse to quit when something seems hard. Instead, they should keep returning to the subject until they feel a sense of accomplishment.

There's no question that your teen will work harder when using this study technique. But stronger recall power is worth it. As one teacher says, "It may feel worse now. But it will feel better when they take the test!"

Source: G.M. Donoghue and J.A.C. Hattie, "A Meta-Analysis of Ten Learning Techniques," *Frontiers in Education*, Frontiers Media S.A.

Family meals foster strong relationships



Where's the best place to connect with your high schooler? It may be the dinner table.

To make the most of family mealtimes:

- **Schedule them.** If you can't eat together every day, enjoy the meals you do share. Try to dine together a few times each week.
- **Be flexible.** If evening meals are too difficult to schedule, share breakfast with your teen instead. You'll have the same opportunity to connect.
- **Include your teen** in mealtime conversations. Ask specific questions to get more than a *yes* or *no* answer. "What's one interesting thing that happened at school today?"
- **Keep it pleasant.** Don't use mealtimes as opportunities to criticize your teen or start arguments.
- **Laugh.** Humor can make mealtime fun for everyone.
- **Go low-tech.** Turn off digital devices and enjoy family meals free from distractions.

Source: S.G. Wallace, "The Art and Science of Family Dinner," *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC.

Suggest activities that help your teen enjoy some time alone



The high school years are a peer-driven time of life. It may seem as if your teen can't make a move unless accompanied by a friend who is doing the exact same thing.

But teenagers need some time alone, too. They need to be reminded that they are worthwhile people and can be happy in their own company. Encourage your teen to engage in pursuits such as:

- **Reading.** Your teen is less likely to feel lonely when immersed in a good book, or any other enjoyable reading material.
- **Arts and crafts.** Teenagers are often wonderfully creative and can produce beautiful work when given the time.

- **Exercise.** Suggest daily walks when you teen can listen to music or an audiobook.
- **Cooking.** Growing teens are usually drawn to the kitchen. Cooking is a rewarding experience that involves all five senses. And as a bonus, your teen can eat the creations!
- **Daydreaming.** Let your teen know it's OK to spend some time just thinking and imagining.

“We need solitude, because when we're alone, we're free from obligations, we don't need to put on a show, and we can hear our own thoughts.”

—*Tamim Ansary*

School counselors provide academic and social support



Your teenager's high school counselor is a valuable resource for both of you. School counselors are highly-trained professionals who are equipped to support students' academic and social development—from choosing classes to dealing with behavioral changes.

Counselors can assist families with a variety of issues. Contact the counselor if:

- **You have questions** about your teen's classes. These can include scheduling questions for next year or issues with current classes.
 - **You are concerned** about your teen's behavior. School counselors are trained to help students identify and work through difficult issues.
- Be sure to remind your teen that the counselor is a trusted adult to go to for guidance.
- **Your teen's grades are suffering.** School counselors can help parents and students figure out the source of academic problems and develop solutions to get grades back on track.
 - **You are facing a crisis.** Counselors can provide support and assistance to students and families as they navigate crisis situations or emergencies.
 - **You have questions** about your teen's future. School counselors can help students decide what they want to do after high school. They can offer advice on potential careers and training, as well as tips for reaching higher education goals.

Are you helping your teen get needed help?



The end of the year is near—but there is still time for students who are struggling to get help.

Are you doing all you can to identify problems and support your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you recognize** the warning signs (failing grades, missed classes) that your teen may be having academic difficulties?

___ **2. Have you helped** your teen identify the possible causes of a problem: not doing assignments, not listening to the teacher, not understanding the assignment?

___ **3. Have you told** your teen that it's a sign of strength to ask for help when it's needed?

___ **4. Have you encouraged** your teen to talk to teachers or a counselor about help available at the school?

___ **5. Have you looked** into other resources if your teen needs more help than the school can provide?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your teen get the support to turn things around. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Volunteering benefits your teenager and your community



Many teens believe they can make the world better. A volunteer job can give your teen a chance to put that belief into action.

Volunteering helps teens do well while they are doing good. It can help them get higher grades. It can help when they apply to college. It can even help them get a better job when they start their career.

Your teen will need to do some planning to reap these benefits of volunteering. Help your student:

- **See the link between schoolwork and volunteer work.** One respected study, the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), highlights this. NELS showed that high school volunteers do better in school. They understand how

volunteer work relates to skills and concepts they are learning in school. Help your teen make these connections.

- **Focus.** Yes, colleges do like to see volunteer activities on applications. But they don't want a long list of different things. They prefer teens to choose one area and focus on it. Help your teen deepen experience in an area of strength.
- **Include the experience** on a résumé and use it to secure a job. Volunteers find it's easier to get a first job. Employers know that volunteers have learned to work with many different kinds of people. They know how to get the job done.

Source: "The Importance of Community Service in a Teen's Life," The Bridge Teen Center.

Combat common attendance excuses from your high schooler



You've probably heard them all—every excuse in the book for why your teen should be allowed to stay home from

school or skip a class. Your teen may have even invented some that weren't around back when you were trying to pull one over on your parents.

Here is a list of common excuses teens use to get out of going to school—and ways to combat them:

- **"I don't feel good."** Say, "OK. I'll need to take you to the doctor then. Don't be surprised if your teen miraculously feels better."
- **"I have a project due in one of my classes that I still need to finish."** Explain that poor time management isn't an excuse. Your teen isn't

allowed to skip a class just to finish an assignment for another one.

- **"I need more sleep."** Offer strategies for getting more sleep. Reducing recreational screen time would probably allow your teen to go to bed an hour earlier each night.
- **"I need to rest before the big game tonight."** School comes before all extracurricular activities, and "big" events are no exception.
- **"Seniors don't have to go to school today."** If this could be possible, call the school to confirm.

However, constantly trying to stay home from school may be a sign of a larger problem. Speak to teachers or the school counselor if you are worried about your teen's reluctance to attend school.

Q: My tenth-grade student is late for everything. Homework is always late and projects are started at the last minute. How can I help my teen break this self-sabotaging habit?

Questions & Answers

A: Unfortunately, time management doesn't come naturally to a lot of teenagers. Instead, parents must teach them how to plan ahead.

Show your student how to:

1. **Get organized.** Insist that your teen's backpack, room and desk are neat. Students who can't organize belongings are likely to have trouble organizing thoughts and actions as well.
2. **Prioritize.** Encourage your teen to list everything that needs to be done under one of three headings: "Must Do," "Would Be Nice to Do" and "Can Skip This." Items on the must-do list (like homework) have to come first.
3. **Make a schedule.** After your teen sets priorities, it's time to figure out when to do those "must-dos." That's where a schedule comes in. Some students can draw up a schedule for the whole week and stick to it. Others need to make a schedule every day to keep on track.
4. **Stick to the schedule.** This may be the hardest step of all. Few teens want to spend a sunny day doing research for an upcoming paper when five of their friends are planning to ride bikes to a nearby park. Encourage and praise your teen for staying on track. And don't forget to leave some time in the schedule for fun!

It Matters: Reading

Reading speed affects students' comprehension



People who are able to read quickly often have a better understanding of what they read. To improve reading speed and comprehension, encourage your teen to:

- **Read silently.** Sometimes slow reading happens because the reader is whispering words aloud. Breaking this habit will allow your teen to read faster and focus more on meaning and less on decoding.
- **Read the material** all the way through before going back to reread. Students who read slowly may lack confidence. They are so sure they missed something that they go back and reread a paragraph several times before going on to the next. This slows reading and rarely improves understanding. Most of the time, your teen will get what's needed from the first reading.
- **Read clusters of words** instead of single words. Meaning is easier to grasp from groups of words than it is from individual words.
- **Match reading speed** to the level of difficulty of the text. When teens reads very challenging material, they should slow down. However, when they read light material, such as fiction and entertainment articles, they should do it as quickly as they can. The practice gained from reading quickly will eventually allow your teen to read everything more quickly.

Source: A. Gautam, "10 Simple Ways to Read Faster and Better," Success Consciousness.

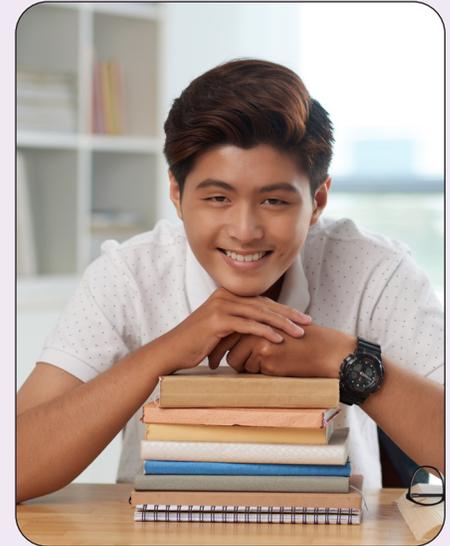
Challenging material helps teens build reading muscles

High school students benefit from reading challenging material. However, many popular teen books are written at a fifth-grade reading level—or lower.

A steady diet of that type of reading won't prepare high schoolers for college. It won't get them ready for the kind of reading they'll have to do on the job.

According to experts, the ability to read complex texts is one of the most important predictors of student success in college. So what can you do to motivate your teen to read more challenging material?

- **Talk about building strength.** Making a muscle stronger involves lifting weights. Making reading muscles stronger involves reading harder content.
- **Make sure your student** completes the reading required for classes.



Teachers often assign challenging works—and the only way to benefit from them is to actually read them.

- **Challenge your teen to read** a difficult book for pleasure. A librarian can offer suggestions.

Help your teen gain a deeper understanding while reading



As students begin to read more complex material in school, they will need to really think about what they're reading. Encourage your high school student to focus on:

- **The author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform the reader? To entertain? To influence thinking?
- **The sequence of events.** What happened first in the story? What happened next? What was the result?
- **The main idea and details.** What is the author's basic message? What elements does the author include that strengthens and supports this message?
- **Figurative language.** "The ocean sang to me," doesn't mean the ocean really *sang*. It means that the ocean was appealing.
- **Relationships** between things that happened in the story and its outcome.
- **The characters' feelings.** What decisions did they make as a result of those feelings?