

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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*still make the difference!*



## A study group can help students build valuable skills

Some parents don't think teens will be very productive if they go over to a friend's house to "study." However, studying with others can actually help students.

Study groups allow students to share their strengths and benefit from those of others. Group work is also great practice for adulthood, when work projects may involve collaboration.

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

- **Choose a size for the group.** Experts suggest between four and six people.
- **Think carefully about members.** This is a critical for forming an effective group. Members should be serious about studying and wanting to do well in school. Teens who are involved in personal

relationships may not do well in a study group together unless they are skilled at separating work from their social life.

- **Consider how to divide the work.** Usually in a study group, each person handles one part of the project. 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.** Set a day and time for meetings and stick to the schedule. This reinforces the idea of a serious study group. Members may also want to pick a chairperson (rotate this position) for each meeting. Part of the chairperson's job is to keep the studying on track.

## Is your teen at risk of dropping out of school?



Students don't wake up one day and simply decide to drop out of high school. The desire to drop out typically builds day by day, and happens over a period of time.

Are you aware of the factors that contribute to students dropping out? Here are three warning signs:

1. **Absences.** Students who miss more than five days in a marking period often fall behind in their schoolwork. They feel frustrated and sometimes decide to give up.
2. **Lack of engagement in class,** often with behavioral problems. Teens who don't keep up with assignments, or who are in constant trouble, may end up dropping out.
3. **Difficulty in core subjects.** Students who are failing in math, science, English or social studies, may have to repeat a grade. Teens who are held back often decide to drop out.

If you see these signs, contact your teen's school counselor. Ask for help getting your student get back on track.

## Avoid four traps when dealing with an underachieving teen



You know your high schooler could do better in school and you want to help with motivation. When doing so, be sure

to avoid these four traps:

- 1. Unrealistic expectations.** There is no question that parents want the best for their children. But if you expect your teen to be the captain of the soccer team, work a part-time job *and* get great grades, you may be setting your child up for failure.
- 2. The need to control.** Some decisions, such as matters of safety, require parental control. However, your teen is the one who will ultimately decide things like whether or not to complete an assignment.
- 3. The urge to “rescue” your teen.** When parents constantly bail out their teens, they learn that they don’t need to try. They also learn that their parents don’t think they can do better. The truth is that

teens will remain helpless as long as parents allow them to. Once they know their parents aren’t going to step in, they will be more likely to step up and figure things out for themselves.

- 4. Anger and guilt.** You already know this doesn’t work. You get angry. Your teen gets angrier. And the assignment doesn’t get finished. So if you feel yourself losing your temper, take a break until you can approach things more calmly.

**Source:** D. Heacox, Ed.D., *Up from Underachievement: How Teachers, Students, and Parents Can Work Together to Promote Student Success*, Free Spirit.

**“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”**

—Helen Keller

## Healthy risk-taking can have academic benefits for your teen



You may think that “taking a risk” is a dangerous thing. However, some risk-taking can actually

be beneficial for students.

When teens take on healthy challenges, they increase their chances for success in school—and reduce the likelihood of taking negative risks. This type of positive risk-taking helps teens develop independence, self-confidence and responsibility.

There are three types of positive risks you should encourage your teen to take:

- 1. School risks.** Your teen could sign up for a higher-level course, or try out for an athletic team, the school band or for the class play. Your teen could even run for class president.
- 2. Life risks.** Your teen could get to know someone new at school or sit with a different group of students during lunch. Your student could take on a physical challenge, such as training for a 5K. Or, sign up for lessons to try something new, such as painting.
- 3. Community risks.** Your teen could organize a volunteer effort, apply for a part-time job or start a business.

## Are you teaching your teen how to get organized?



Most teens are not naturally organized. They need to be taught strategies that will help them get to school on

time, with the books and homework they need.

Are you sharing organization strategies with your teen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- 1. Does your teen** use a planner to record homework assignments and review it after school each day?
- 2. Does your teen** have a set place by the door for things that are going to school the next day?
- 3. Does your teen** break large projects into smaller parts and create deadlines for each section?
- 4. Does your teen** schedule time for homework, work and activities—and write it on a calendar?
- 5. Does your teen** keep supplies and references handy for doing assignments and other projects?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you’re encouraging your teen to use organization strategies. Mostly *no* answers? Try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Help your teen study effectively for math and science classes



Studying for math and science classes often requires different skills than studying for other subjects. To study math

and science effectively, encourage your teen to:

- **Schedule extra time**, especially if math or science classes seem challenging. Your teen should block out time to work on these subjects every day.
- **Start each study session** with a review. Your teen should look back over what the teacher covered in class before working on new material.
- **Verify understanding.** Urge your teen to read any questions at the

end of a chapter. If your teen can't answer all of them it's time to look back through the text.

- **Draw a picture.** If your teen is having trouble understanding something, suggest drawing a diagram. Making a picture of something can help students see how things fit together.
- **Answer all of the questions.** Some teachers will tell students to answer only the first five questions on a worksheet or only the even-numbered ones. If your teen tackles *all* the questions or solves *all* the problems, it may boost confidence. When encountering similar questions on a test, your teen will know how to answer them.

# Graphic organizers can help students gather their thoughts



Gathering ideas is often the first hurdle high school students need to get over when they are faced with a writing

assignment. Many teens just don't know where to start.

Graphic organizers can help students organize their thoughts effectively. Here are a few to try:

- **Venn diagrams.** These can be helpful when writing a "compare and contrast" essay. To make one, your teen should draw two overlapping circles. In the outer portions of each circle, write down the differences between the two topics. Where the circles overlap, your teen can write down how they are the same.
- **Flow charts.** These are helpful when writing a narrative. A

narrative tells a story about a series of events. To make a flow chart, your teen should draw a series of boxes with arrows leading from one box to the next. In the first box, your teen should write down the first event in the story.

The next event goes in the next box, and so on.

- **Web diagrams.** These are helpful for identifying details that support a main idea. Your teen should draw a large circle and inside it write the theme of the essay. In smaller circles branching off the large one, your teen can write supporting details.
- **Story boards.** These are another way to organize a narrative. Your teen should make a short list of ideas to cover, then sketch it out and fill in details.

**Q:** My teen tends to put things off. If he has a big paper due, he waits until the night before—usually very late on the night before. He's bright, but his grades suffer. How can I help my son break the procrastination habit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Most teens put things off at one time or another. But some teens are regular procrastinators. In addition to driving their parents crazy, these teens end up creating a lot of unnecessary stress—and they usually don't perform as well academically as they could.

To help your teen put an end to the procrastination habit:

- **Get to the bottom of it.** Ask why your teen puts things off. Is he afraid of failing? Does he like the thrill of dashing something off at the last minute? Or, is he just unmotivated? Whatever the cause, explain that he needs to address it.
- **Demonstrate how to divide** large projects into smaller pieces. Have your teen set deadlines for each piece. He may still wait until close to deadlines to finish each part, but bit by bit he'll finish the job. Once your teen gets started on a project, it will be easier for him to keep working. As he finishes each task, he can reward himself with an enjoyable activity.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** Saying things like, "There's no time like the present" can be very motivating!
- **Help your teen see assignments** in terms of long-term goals. Learning how to manage time will lead to success in high school and in college.

# It Matters: Building Character

## Volunteering builds character and experience



Volunteering is an effective way to help teens build character. Community service teaches responsibility,

discipline and teamwork.

When teens participate in community service, they contribute to society—and to their own future. Volunteer work can help teens:

- **Explore and discover** new interests.
- **Gain work experience** and build organizational, leadership and social skills.
- **Boost confidence.** Experts agree that helping strangers increases teens' feelings of self-worth.
- **Widen their social circle.** Teens will get to know people from a variety of backgrounds and generations. They may even find a mentor.
- **Enhance college applications.** Many colleges view community service as a valuable learning experience.

Your teen may be able to:

- **Serve meals** at a soup kitchen.
- **Collect blankets** and pet food for an animal shelter.
- **Work** at a food pantry, sorting donated goods.
- **Help** out with a food or clothing drive.
- **Send letters** of thanks to veterans.
- **Collect items** for a homeless shelter.

To find volunteer opportunities in your area, encourage your teen to contact the school counselor, local libraries, religious organizations and community service groups.

## Character development starts with respectful behavior

To be successful, students must learn how to show respect for others—including classmates, parents, teachers and coaches. Remind your teen that students should:

- **Listen politely** when others speak. This means looking at the speaker and not interrupting.
- **Show up on time.** Whether it's band practice, history class, or lunch with a friend, timely arrival shows respect.
- **Use manners.** Saying *please*, *thank you*, *excuse me* and *you're welcome* shows that your teen is considerate and appreciative.
- **Watch tone of voice.** *How* your teen says something is just as important as *what* your teen says.
- **Listen to others' ideas** and opinions. Your teen may disagree—and that's OK. Expressing opinions respectfully keeps interactions civil..



- **Accept the final word.** Many teens press their case even when an adult stands firm. Explain that this rarely works.

## A positive attitude helps teens succeed in school and beyond



Many key elements of character, including kindness, empathy and leadership, are impossible to achieve by looking only at the negative side of life. That's why having a positive attitude is one of the cornerstones of character.

Encourage your teen to:

- **Be hopeful.** Rather than worrying about everything that could go wrong, suggest focusing on the steps your teen can take now to make things go right. Feeling

empowered is the first step toward success.

- **Move on.** Sometimes things won't go your teen's way. Acknowledge the disappointment, but after a few days, encourage your teen to accept the situation and look in a new direction.
- **Avoid comparisons.** There will always be someone who seems smarter, more talented or more fortunate. Focusing on feelings of inadequacy can extinguish positivity.