

# High School Parents®

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## Sneak some reading into your teen's winter break

**Y**our high schooler may be on a break from school, but it's important that she stay in the habit of reading. Here are some easy ways to sneak some reading into her time off:

- **Get cooking.** Whether you're preparing a big holiday meal or just baking cookies, ask your teen to help. She'll not only have to read and follow the directions to successfully create the recipe, but she'll also get to practice her math skills when measuring out ingredients.
- **Take a trip to the local library** together. If she doesn't have too much homework over the break, she may have time to read a book for pleasure. Ask the librarian to suggest a few popular titles.
- **Give books as gifts.** If your family celebrates a holiday this month, consider giving your teen a magazine subscription or a few books as gifts.
- **Encourage your teen to read** aloud. She could read a book to her younger brother while you run a few errands. Or perhaps she could spend time reading to an older relative who can't see that well. She could even read a few interesting articles to you while you cook or clean up.
- **Bring books on trips.** If you're taking a trip over the break, make sure your teen packs some reading material to bring with her. It will help beat the boredom of traveling—and keep her reading skills sharp at the same time.

## Help your teen take effective class notes



Many teens have never learned how to take notes. Yet most teachers expect students

to write down and remember what they are taught in class.

Share some strategies to help your teen take better notes:

- **Be prepared.** Your teen should make sure he brings plenty of pencils, pens and paper to class.
- **Leave plenty of room.** He may want to add a few ideas later, so he should leave some blank space on each page of his notes.
- **Use visuals.** Encourage your teen to use charts and diagrams to make an idea more clear.
- **Create shortcuts.** Writing out "Revolutionary War" takes too much time. He should create an abbreviation and write a key in the margin ("RW = Revolutionary War").
- **Use colors and shapes.** Your teen can draw a circle around the most important idea. He can use colored markers or highlighters to show how ideas relate.

# Maximize learning with five memory-boosting strategies



Memory skills, especially long-term memory skills, are critical for learning. Long-term memory is what builds the “store of knowledge” we draw on all our lives. To help your teen boost her memory power, share these five strategies:

1. **Look at the big picture.** If she knows an upcoming test is on Chapter Four, your teen will want to spend most of her time on that chapter. However, she should also take a few moments to look at summaries of other chapters. Doing so tells her how Chapter Four relates to the whole unit. Her memory will improve if she understands this relationship.
2. **Put information on index cards and review the cards frequently.** This tried-and-true method really does make remembering small chunks of information easier.

3. **Focus hardest on the middle part of reading material, because our brains remember the beginning and end parts best.**
4. **Use mnemonics or acronyms.** Techniques like reciting the poem, “Thirty days hath September,” can help teens recall information.
5. **Study and then rest or sleep.** The brain is never asleep. While your teen’s body is getting much needed rest, her brain will still be working on sorting out and retaining the material she fed it just before going to bed.

Source: E. Jensen, *Student Success Secrets*, Barron’s Educational Series.

**“Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”**

—Malcolm Forbes

# Writing tasks down can help high schoolers stay focused



Teens can be easily distracted—and that’s very obvious when they sit down to study. But written lists can motivate your teen to get to work faster and stay focused longer.

Help your teen learn to manage his time with these written methods:

- **Daily—with a to-do list.** Suggest that he write down everything he has to do that day. Then it’s time to create a schedule. Remind your teen to include short breaks after every 50 minutes of working.
- **Weekly—with a planner.** Encourage him to plan out his

time for the upcoming week—his classes, appointments, meetings, practices, family dinners, etc. Then he can fill in his study time. Seeing that he has to stick to this schedule if he wants to go out on Friday night may motivate him to stay focused.

- **Monthly—with a calendar.** A large wall or desk calendar can help him plan for long-term assignments. He can break down big assignments like projects or term papers into shorter steps. Giving each section of the project a due date will make the large task feel less daunting.

# Are you helping your teen handle after-school time?



Teens spend twice as much time out of the classroom as in it. And studies show that teens who use those after-school hours wisely tend to do better in school.

Are you helping your teen make the most of after-school hours? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you know** where your teen goes after school?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you ask your teen** to check in with you when he gets home from school if you are at work?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Have you encouraged** your teen to join a school club or sport he enjoys? Extracurricular activities benefit teens in many ways.
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you limit** your teen’s recreational screen time after school?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Does your teen** have a regular study time and do you check to see that homework is finished?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you’re helping your teen use after-school hours wisely. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
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Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.  
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Coaching can help your high schooler make better decisions



Ever watch how a coach teaches an athlete a new skill? Generally, the coach breaks the skill down into smaller parts, then lets the athlete practice them until the skill is mastered.

This same approach works for teaching teens how to make better decisions. Here's how:

1. **Discuss the issue.** What is it your teen needs to do or decide? What does she already know about this issue?
2. **Gather information.** If your teen has to make a decision about a situation she's never faced before, encourage her to avoid making a choice until she has as much information as possible.
3. **List the alternatives.** Remind your teen not to think of all decisions as either/or choices.
4. **Think about consequences.** Have your teen write one alternative at the top of a piece of paper, then draw a line down the middle. On the left side of the paper, she should write the positive consequences from that decision. She should write negative consequences on the right side.
5. **Consider feelings and values.** Sometimes, the best decision on paper may not feel right. Teens need to think about their family's values as they make a choice.
6. **Choose the best course of action.** Although it's hard to let go of this part of the decision-making process, it's the most important step to turn over to your teen. If your teen makes a wise choice, praise her. If she makes a poor choice, help her see how she can avoid that mistake the next time.

## Reduce your teenager's stress to improve attendance and learning



Research has found that teens who experience stressful events at home are likely to have attendance problems and difficulty learning at school for up to two days following the event.

The study found that sources of stress for teens included:

- **Conflict with parents.**
- **Family demands.**
- **Problems with homework.**
- **Time management issues.**

It makes sense: If your teen is spending his time in science class thinking about something that happened at home the night before, he is less likely to pay attention—and therefore less likely to learn.

If your teen is experiencing stress, suggest that he:

- **Take a deep breath.** Taking the time to stop and think about the issue at hand may help your teen see a solution to the problem.
- **Exercise.** Twenty to 30 minutes of exercise can relieve tension and clear your teen's head. If he's feeling stressed, encourage him to go for a run or try some yoga.
- **Keep a journal.** Some teens find that it's easier to write down their feelings. This is a great way to relieve stress—and your teen will be strengthening his writing skills at the same time.

**Source:** J. Warner, "Teen Stress at Home Lingers in School," WebMD Health News, [nswc.com/high\\_stressed](http://nswc.com/high_stressed).

**Q:** My daughter, a junior, talks with her friends—constantly. She's either on the phone with them or texting them. But she has nothing to say to me! If I ask her how school went, she'll answer with, "OK." If I ask who she's going out with, she says, "Friends." We used to be close. What can I do to get her talking with me again?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** The short answer to your question is, "Wait a few years." Right now your daughter is trying to separate from you. She's trying to figure out who she is. And to do that, she needs to put some distance between the two of you.

While this separation is developmentally normal, she is still your daughter, it's still your house and you still have a right to know what's going on. So if she tells you she's going with "friends," you can say, "I need more information. Otherwise, you're not going anywhere with anyone."

In other words, she doesn't have to share *all* the details of her life. She does, however, have to answer basic questions about her safety. Where is she going? With whom? When will she be back? Otherwise, she can't go.

To encourage more talk, do some side-by-side activities together—cooking, watching TV, driving in a car. Somehow, teens are more likely to talk if they don't have to make eye contact at the same time.

In a few years, your teen will be standing on her own two feet. That's when she's likely to call and say, "Mom, can we talk?" But for now, give your daughter the space she needs to grow.

# It Matters: Building Character

## Volunteering builds character and experience



Volunteering is a great way to help teens build character. Community service teaches important

lessons in responsibility, discipline and teamwork.

When your teen participates in community service, he contributes to society—and to his own future. Volunteer work can help him identify career interests and build workplace skills. It can also enhance his college applications, as many colleges view community service as a valuable learning experience.

Studies show that teens who volunteer just two hours a week are 50 percent less likely to smoke, drink or do drugs. In addition, teens who volunteer earn better grades and develop leadership skills that will help them throughout life.

The holiday season offers many opportunities for community service. Your teen can:

- **Volunteer** at a soup kitchen.
- **Work** at a food pantry, sorting donated goods.
- **Visit** a nursing home.
- **Help** with a food or clothing drive.
- **Collect** items for a toy drive.
- **Wrap** gifts at a local mall.

Check at your local library or community center for volunteer opportunities in your area.

**Source:** R. Grimm, Jr. and others, *Youth Helping America: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering*, Corporation for National & Community Service, [niscw.com/high\\_community](http://niscw.com/high_community).

## A positive attitude is vital to success in school and in life!

A positive attitude is the cornerstone of character. Many key elements of character, including kindness, empathy and leadership, are impossible to achieve if you only look at the dark side of life.

To promote positivity, encourage your teen to:

- **Be hopeful.** Rather than worrying about everything that could go wrong in his life, he should focus on the steps he can take now to make sure things go right! Believing that he *will* succeed is the first step towards success.
- **Move on.** Sometimes things won't go your teen's way. Be sure to acknowledge his disappointment, but after a few days, encourage him to put it behind him and look in a new direction.



- **Avoid comparing himself** to others. There will always be someone who seems smarter, more talented or more fortunate. Focusing on feelings of inadequacy can extinguish positivity.

## Talk to your teen about how to treat others with respect



To be successful, teens must learn how to show respect for others—classmates, parents, teachers and coaches.

Tell your teen she can show respect by:

- **Listening politely** when others speak. This means looking at the speaker and not interrupting.
- **Showing up on time.** Whether it's soccer practice, history class, or lunch with a friend, she should plan to arrive on time.
- **Using her manners.** Saying *please*, *thank you* and *you're*

*welcome* shows she is considerate and appreciative.

- **Watching her tone of voice.** Remind her that *how* she says something is just as important as *what* she says.
- **Listening to others' ideas** and opinions. She may disagree with something someone says—and that's OK. Teach your teen how to express her opinion respectfully, without arguing.
- **Accepting the final word.** Many teens press their case even when an adult stands firm. Explain that this rarely works.