

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Merkel High School  
Bryan Allen, Principal

*still make the difference!*



## Teens care more about school when parents are involved

**B**y the time their kids reach high school, most parents aren't very involved at the school. That's even true of those who had been quite involved when their children were younger.

But while being active at the high school level is different, it's still just as important. Teens care more about school when they know their parents care about it, too.

To show your teen that school matters to you:

- **Attend back-to-school night.** Ignore all protests from your teen that "you don't have to go," and "no one else's parents are going." Go anyway and meet as many of her teachers as you can.
- **Talk about school.** Ask her to tell you about each of her classes and teachers. Which class is she most

excited about? Which one does she think will be the most challenging? And don't stop asking questions once the school year becomes routine. Ask about school every day, even if it's just, "Tell me one thing you learned at school today."

- **Try not to miss special occasions.** You may not be able to make every game or hear every speech. But make as many as possible. When you can't be there, let your teen know that your heart is with her.
- **Chaperone.** Volunteer to help out with one dance, game or field trip. Again, ignore your teen's requests for you to stay away. Your involvement will show your teen that she is important to you.

**Source:** L. McMullen, "Students Learn Better with Engaged Parents," US News & World Report, [nismc.com/matters](http://nismc.com/matters).

## Ninth grade is a make-it or break-it year



Ninth grade is often referred to as a make-it or break-it year for students. Research

shows that students who end their ninth grade year successfully are four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who don't.

Attendance is a big part of that success. One study found that:

- **90 percent of students** who missed fewer than four days of school each semester graduated four years later.
- **Only 63 percent of students** who missed five to nine days graduated.
- **As the number of absences** increased, the graduation rates went down.

It's not hard to figure out why absences are linked to school success. When students miss important information one day, they can't put it to use the next. So if you want to go to a high school graduation in four years, send your ninth grader to school today.

**Source:** "Freshman Year: The Make-it or Break-it Year," Consortium on Chicago School Research, [nismc.com/makeit](http://nismc.com/makeit).

## Support your teen's ability to think critically in high school



As your teen gets older, he is learning to think in a more complex way. Your teenager has begun to develop:

- **Advanced reasoning skills.** He is able to think about multiple possibilities and hypothetical situations.
- **Abstract thinking skills.** He can think about concepts that can't be physically touched, like spirituality.
- **The ability to think about thinking.** This allows your teen to consider how he is processing what he is learning and feeling.

Changes in thinking are often displayed in "typical" teen behavior, such as believing that "no one" understands what's going on. Teens also tend to become more concerned with the world around them. They may start strongly supporting a cause, or point out differences between adults' words and actions.

You can support your teen's developing thinking skills if you:

- **Listen to his concerns.** Try not to be offended if he says you "don't understand." Instead, enlist the help of an older sibling or family friend, and have your teen turn to him for advice.
- **Listen to his ideas.** Let him give his opinion on your rules and their consequences.
- **Discuss his views** of the world—and talk about your own. Ask about his political ideas and spiritual beliefs.
- **Encourage him to get involved** in causes he feels strongly about.

**"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."**

—Aristotle

## Now is the time for your teen to chart a course for college



Whether your teen is a freshman or a senior, there are things you can do this school year to make sure she's on track to graduate from high school and move on to college. Here's a partial list to help you get started:

- **Freshman year,** encourage your teen to get involved in clubs, volunteer work or sports. Work with her to develop a plan for obtaining financial aid. She should let her guidance counselor know that she plans to go to college.
- **Sophomore year,** your teen should be researching colleges of interest. She should make sure she is signed up for the classes she needs to meet high school graduation requirements.
- **Junior year,** your teen should prepare for and take college admissions tests (ACT and/or SAT). High school graduation requirements often differ from college admission requirements. So she should make sure she is taking the courses she needs to satisfy both.
- **Senior year,** your teen should begin her college applications. She should post the dates she needs to submit the applications and financial aid forms. Meeting these deadlines is crucial.

## Are you making the most of talks with your teen?



A strong relationship with your teenager begins with effective communication. Are you making the most of your conversations

with him? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make time to listen** when your teen wants to talk? If you aren't able to give him your full attention, set a time to listen in the near future. And keep the appointment.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask questions** to make sure you understand what your teen is saying and show interest by asking for details?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you look for opportunities** to genuinely compliment your teen?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you try to be fair?** This doesn't mean you always do what your teen wants. It just means that you will listen.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you admit** that you don't have all the answers?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're making good use of the time you spend talking with your teen. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
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# Emphasizing *effort* over grades reduces teens' academic stress



Today's high school students are completely stressed out! According to a recent poll conducted by the Robert Wood

Johnson Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, 40 percent of high schoolers experience significant stress related to academic pressure.

Teens are working harder than ever to become college- and career-ready and many feel pressured to get perfect grades. As a parent, of course you want your teen to do her best. However, insisting on perfection is unrealistic and stressful. To reduce this pressure:

- **Be clear about the message** you're sending. Sometimes, teens get the message that parents want good

grades at any cost. That can lead teens to think that cheating is OK.

- **Let your teen know** that your love for her has nothing to do with her grades. Some teens believe that bringing home a good report card is the only way to make their parents proud.
- **Have your teen focus** on *doing* her best, not *being* the best. All teens can strive for the first goal.
- **Put pressure about college** in perspective. Yes, it is hard to get into a small number of very select colleges. But there are many more great schools out there. Assure your teen that you'll work together to find a great college.

**Source:** *Education and Health in Schools*, NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Harvard School of Public Health, [nswc.com/stress](http://nswc.com/stress).

## Follow these five strategies for successful study sessions



Not all teens know how to study. Those that don't may spend more time than they need to on their work for school.

Or they may get frustrated and stop studying completely.

Share these strategies to help your teen study effectively:

1. **Take notes in class.** Writing down what the teacher says can help your teen see what the teacher thinks is important. Reviewing his notes regularly will also improve his retention of the material.
2. **Break it up.** Research shows that frequent short study sessions are more effective than one long study session.
3. **Study similar subjects at different times.** Putting new information

into your brain is a little like pouring concrete. You have to give it time to "set up." So between a science lesson with a lot of formulas and a math lesson with a lot of formulas, your teen should study history or English.

4. **Avoid getting sidetracked.** If your teen finds his mind wandering during study time, he should keep a note pad by his study spot. That way he can jot down reminders or random ideas that pop into his head and then get right back to studying.
5. **Eliminate distractions.** The TV, his phone and a growling stomach will all distract your teen. Make sure he turns off all electronics and takes care of hunger and thirst before sitting down to study.

**Q:** My daughter is taking full honors classes this year, plays three sports, has a part-time job and volunteers in a homeless shelter. She says she needs to do all this to get into college. How can I tell if she's doing too much?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Your daughter's schedule sounds pretty typical. Today's teens carry a full load. Between their schoolwork and their extra-curricular activities, many of them have no time for themselves.

The toughest thing for you to remember is that it is her life. She is making choices and learning how to set priorities. You can help by asking two questions:

1. **Does she have any downtime?**  
All teens need to have some unscheduled time every week to relax, hang out with friends or just listen to music and daydream.
2. **Is she doing these activities because she enjoys them?**  
Colleges aren't looking for someone who has plodded through activities they didn't like in order to build a résumé. They are more interested in seeing a connection between your teen's activities and her passions. Ask your teen to think about the things she does. If there are any she is doing only because she thinks she has to, those may be the ones to drop.

If your teen's grades start to slip, help her rethink what she's doing. Keep the lines of communication open and be sure to let her know you love her for who she is, and not what she does.

# It Matters: Responsibility

## These four R's turn mistakes into lessons



Everyone makes mistakes—especially teenagers! But that's okay. Teens can learn important lessons about responsibility from their mistakes.

Suppose your teen has put off writing her research paper until the night before it is due. The computer crashes and she loses her work. Now she won't be able to turn her paper in on time. She's made a mistake. But she can learn from it by following these four steps:

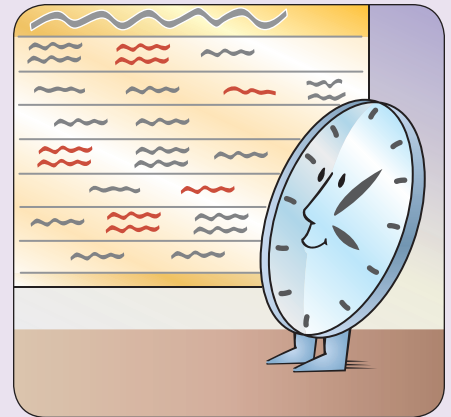
- 1. Responsibility.** Your teen may start by blaming others (or the computer). But she needs to own up to what *she* has done. "I waited until the last minute. When my computer crashed, I didn't have enough time to redo my work."
- 2. Recognition.** Once your teen realizes she has made a mistake, she needs to figure out what she might have done differently. "If I hadn't waited so long, I would have had more time to redo it. I could have typed it at school. Next time, I will start earlier."
- 3. Reconciliation.** When a mistake negatively affects another person, your teen should apologize. She should talk to her teacher and let him know what she learned about deadlines.
- 4. Resolution.** Your teen must figure out how to solve the problem. She could talk to her teacher and ask about completing extra work to make up for her low grade.

## Learning how to manage time has great benefits for students

Using time wisely is one of the best lessons in responsibility that anyone can learn. It will keep your teen from missing deadlines and appointments. It will help him stay up to date with school-work. And it will help him lead a smoother, less stressful, life.

To help your teen better manage his time this school year, have him:

- **Use a planner or calendar.** He should write down everything on his schedule for the week and check it throughout the day.
- **Limit screen media.** The TV, computer and smart phone are usually the biggest offenders. Don't ask your teen to give them up completely. But ask him to find ways to limit their use.
- **Do a little at a time.** Studying 30 minutes each day is much more effective than trying to cram for six hours the night before a test.



- **Say no to things** that will overload him. If he already has homework, football practice and a part-time job, he probably doesn't have time to participate in another after-school activity.
- **Schedule a "catch-up day"** once a week where he works on a task that he has been putting off.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

## Responsibility helps prepare your teenager for adulthood



As a high school student, your teen is practicing—and not just for the latest quiz or for her lines in the school play. She's practicing for adulthood. Assuming more responsibility for herself is the way to get there.

To set your teen up for success in school and in life:

- **Let her make decisions.** At this age, your teen should have *some* say in nearly everything that affects her.

- **Let her make mistakes.** Parents naturally want to rescue their kids. Avoid doing that unless it's a matter of your teen's safety.
- **Skip power struggles.** Instead of trying to control your teen—"Get upstairs and do that homework now!"—place the control on yourself. For example, "I'll be happy to drive you to the mall after you do your homework."

Source: F. Cline, M.D. and J. Fay, *Parenting Teens With Love & Logic, Preparing Adolescents for Responsible Adulthood*, Pinon Press.