



Help Your Teen Succeed  
in High School

# Help Your Teen Succeed in High School

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## Introduction

High school seemed so far away back when your child stepped into a kindergarten classroom for the first time. But now, here they are, a high school freshman. Starting high school is a big change in your student's life, and for you, too. Your teenager will become more independent. They will meet new friends and develop new interests. They will also begin thinking about life after graduation.

This handbook will show you how to be there for your teenager during these important high school years. Get tips on how to be an active partner in your high schooler's education while giving them room to explore and discover on their own. Learn ways to keep up with what's happening at school, helping your student develop strong study skills and encouraging them to prepare for the future.



# 1. Help Your Teen Adjust to High School

Your teen will feel more confident going to high school if they know what to expect ahead of time. Talk with them about any concerns, such as finding their way around or making friends. Come up with a plan to address these.

- Make sure your student attends any orientations and information sessions for incoming freshmen.
- Look at the course listings together. Your teen should challenge themselves by taking higher-level classes, especially if college is in their future. However, they shouldn't take classes that are so hard that they will fall behind.
- Call the school during the summer to see about visiting the building. If your teen already has their schedule, find their classrooms so they'll know how to get to them when school starts.
- Talk about your own high school experiences. Your teen will feel better if they hear how you made new friends, found your way around a new building and managed tough classes.

## Help Your Teen Get Involved

Taking part in sports, clubs and other activities will enrich your student's high school experience. They'll feel part of the school, make new friends and learn new skills. Extracurriculars also look good on college and job applications.

### Benefits of student involvement

Students who are involved in extracurriculars tend to:

- Have a higher grade point average
- Have a better attendance record
- Be less likely to drop out
- Have fewer disciplinary problems
- Be healthier when they're involved with school sports
- Feel a deeper connection with their school and their peers

### Ways to help your student get involved

- Talk with your teen about trying out for a team. They may be interested in a new sport, or one that they are familiar with.
- Find out if the school has an activities fair, where your student can learn about different clubs and activities.
- If your student isn't interested in anything the school has to offer, talk about joining an organization outside of school. Ideas include a youth group at your house of worship, scouts, 4H or community sports teams.

## 2. Help Your Teen Prepare for the Future

Freshman year is not too early to begin laying the groundwork for your student's post-graduation plans.

- Have your teen meet with their guidance counselor. The counselor will make sure your student is taking the right classes to meet graduation requirements.
- Encourage your teen to build relationships with their teachers. They are a great resource for figuring out the future and how best to get there.
- Ask friends and family to talk with your teenager about their careers.
- Arrange for your student to spend a day shadowing someone in a career that interests them.

### *Preparing for college*

- Learn about college admission requirements. Many schools will only consider applicants who have taken a minimum number of years in certain subjects. Know about these requirements ahead of time so your student will be sure to fit in all required classes.
- Have your teen meet with the school guidance counselor to make sure they're on track with their coursework.
- Visit colleges together.

### *Preparing for the military*

- Teenagers considering a military career should join team sports or activities. This will give them practice working cooperatively.
- Talk with your teen about working on strength and endurance training and overall physical fitness.
- Encourage your teen to join the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), if the high school offers the program.

### *Preparing for work*

- See if the high school offers a career assessment test. This will help your teen figure out their strengths and interests and point them toward a suitable career path.
- Encourage your teen to volunteer. They will learn about different work environments and make valuable connections.
- Start investigating licensing and certifications if your teenager is thinking about going into a trade.



### 3. Get Involved in Your High Schooler's Education

Kids never outgrow the need for their parents to be involved in their education. Studies show that students with involved parents tend to do better in school than those whose parents take a hands-off approach. In fact, research shows that parents' involvement is more important to their children's success than their own level of education, how much money they make or how old their kids are.

#### Learn About High School

Your teenager's high school experience may be different from yours in many ways. Become familiar with the school and how it operates.

- Attend any orientations or meetings for parents of incoming freshmen.
- Read the school's handbook. The handbook will lay out the school's policies and educational philosophy. Find out about the school's rules on attendance, dress code, student behavior, use of electronics, cheating, vandalism and more.
- Discuss the school's rules and expectations with your teen.
- Visit the school's website regularly for listings of events, testing dates, holiday schedules and more.
- Sign up for email, text or phone alerts about important events and news happening at the school.
- Use the online parent portal, if your school offers this service. Your teen's assignments, grades and classes will be listed there.
- Attend back-to-school night. Most schools hold these in the fall.



## Make the Most of Back-to-School Night

Back-to-school night at high school offers a chance to follow your student's schedule and meet their teachers. Each teacher will likely give a formal presentation and there may be time for you to visit other areas of the school, such as the gym, media center and more.

During the evening, expect to find out about:

- The curriculum and learning goals for each subject.
- The grading policy of each teacher.
- Homework expectations and how grades are affected when homework is handed in late.
- The policy on makeup work due to absences.
- How the teacher will communicate to parents, for example through email or parent portal.
- Opportunities for parent involvement.

### Questions to ask

The following questions will probably be answered during presentations from teacher and administrators at back-to-school night. If not, then raise your hand and ask.

- What clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities are offered?
- How do AP classes work? How many AP classes are recommended per term?
- Are teachers available for extra help?
- How does the school prepare students for graduation and beyond?
- How is discipline handled?
- How does the school deal with bullying and cyberbullying? Does it focus on prevention? What happens when a student accuses another of bullying?
- What is the response plan in the event of a violent threat on school grounds or in the building?

If possible, take time to meet the principal, the guidance counselor and other staff members your student interacts with.



## Prepare for the Parent-Teacher Conference

Most schools hold parent-teacher conferences before the end of the first marking period. These meetings are usually brief because the teachers have a lot of parents to fit in during a short period of time.

- Ask your student if they have trouble with any classes and which ones are their favorites.
- Look up your student's grades online, if available
- Bring a list of questions to ask each teacher.
- Bring a pen and paper so you can jot down notes.
- If your teen is not doing well in a subject, ask the teacher about opportunities for extra help.

### Questions to Ask at Your Parent-Teacher Conference

During the parent-teacher conference, your high schooler's teachers may discuss how your student did on specific assignments and tests. Ask:

- ☐ How do you weight quizzes, tests, homework and assignments?
- ☐ Is my child on target?
- ☐ How much time should my child spend on homework for your class?
- ☐ Will you assign any major projects or term papers?
- ☐ What can I do at home to help my child do well in your class?





## Volunteer at School

While hands-on volunteer opportunities aren't as plentiful at the high school level, there are ways to support your teenager's school.

### *Volunteer behind the scenes*

- Serve on the school's parent advisory committee.
- Tutor students.
- Join a booster club for a sports team, band or chorus.
- Work with the art teachers to hang artwork or install art exhibits in the corridors.
- Sew costumes or help build sets for school drama productions.
- Help plant, weed and maintain the school's flower beds with your family on weekends or after work.

### *Volunteer occasionally*

- Speak at career day.
- Help plan and chaperone dances, after-prom parties and other in-school events.
- Work the school concession stand during sporting events.

## Other Ways to Be Engaged

- Go to school concerts, plays and sporting events.
- Attend school board meetings. If you can't make it to the meetings, find out if they're aired on local cable TV or live-streamed online. Your local newspaper may also cover board meetings.
- Get to know other parents and exchange contact information.



## 4. Support Learning at Home

Your student's education doesn't end with the last bell of the school day. As a parent, you can encourage learning at home and make sure your child has the tools that make learning possible.

- Encourage your teen to eat a healthy diet. Kids need the right kind of fuel to function at their best. Send your student off to school with a breakfast rich in protein, whole grains and fiber.
- Limit your teen's screen time. Create "media-free" zones in your home, such as bedrooms and the dinner table.
- If your teen has a part-time job, make sure they work no more than three hours on school days and 18 hours per week. If a part-time job is interfering with school work, talk with your teen about cutting back their hours. Make it clear that school comes first.
- Make sure your high schooler gets enough sleep. Teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep each night.

### Talk With Your Teenager About School

Your best source for how things are going in school is your child. Some kids are more open with their parents than others. Be available when they are ready to have a conversation.

- Let conversations happen naturally. Don't pepper your child with questions.
- Adolescents tend to talk more readily when they're not face-to-face. While driving in the car, for example, walking the dog or doing dishes. Take advantage of these times together by getting the conversation going.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "What did you like best about today?" or "Tell me about one thing that you learned today."
- Tell your teen something interesting or funny about your own day. Sometimes that can be the opening they need to describe their own day.



## 5. Know Your Teen's Learning Style

You may already have an idea of how your teen learns best. Some kids are happiest with their nose in a book. Others can't sit still. They absorb information best when they're moving. Many kids use a combination of methods to learn, though they may prefer one over the others.

Share the chart below with your student so they can use the strategies that best match their learning style.

Learning Style	Learns best by ...	Try doing this ...
<b>Visual</b>	Reading Watching videos Studying pictures, images, maps and charts	Take detailed notes. Make and use flash cards to help with studying. Use highlighters and colored sticky notes for underlining and color-coding. Draw pictures or diagrams of concepts that you're learning.
<b>Auditory</b>	Listening to lectures and lessons Singing Playing instruments	Use rhymes and other memory aids to help with memorization. Record yourself explaining a problem or concept and play it back. Read material and notes out loud. Discuss material and ideas with other students.
<b>Physical</b>	Being active physically Using body and hand gestures when telling a story Actively working on a project or problem	Take study breaks by getting up and moving. Act out the material you're studying. Walk around while studying. Use a stress ball or doodle on paper while studying.



## 6. Help Your Student Get Organized

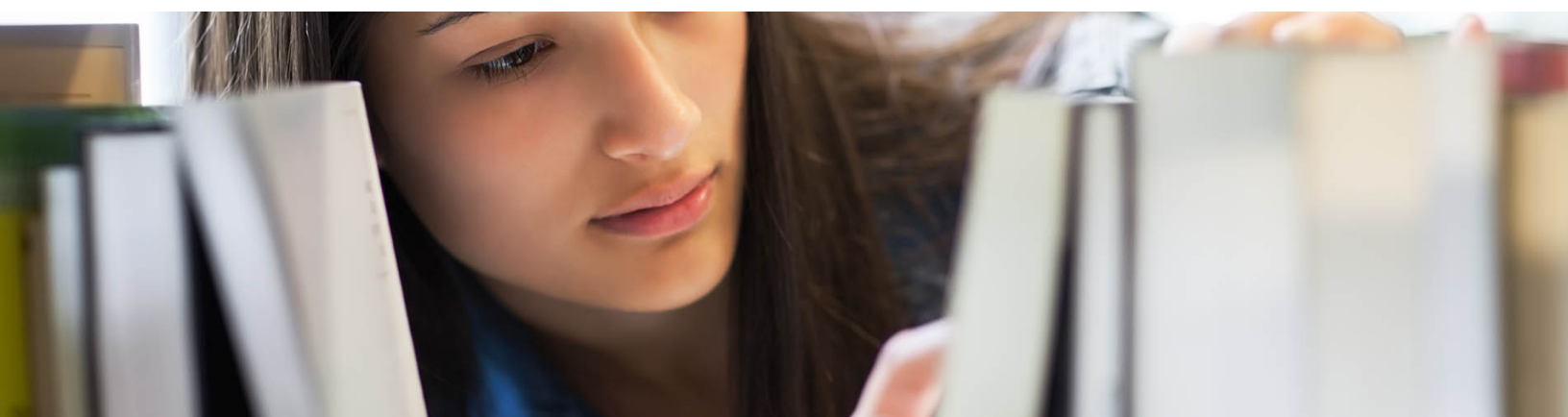
Staying organized is key to doing well in school. Help your teen create three schedules: one covering the term, one for each week and one for each day.

Term Schedule	Weekly Schedule	Daily Schedule
<i>At the beginning of the term, prepare a calendar with:</i>	<i>On Sunday nights jot down the following in your weekly planner:</i>	<i>Each morning, write down and block out time for:</i>
✓ Assignments and due dates	✓ Important dates from your term calendar	✓ The day's tasks
✓ Test dates	✓ Classes	✓ Yesterday's uncompleted tasks
✓ School activities	✓ Activities	✓ What you need to do to prepare for the next day
✓ Extracurricular activities	✓ Study sessions	
	✓ Assignments with due dates	

### Time Management

Keeping calendars and to-do lists will help your student manage their time. In addition, help them get in the habit of doing the following:

- Turn off the phone and all social media while doing homework or studying.
- Figure out which assignments to tackle first. Your child may want to get the hardest homework out of the way first, while their mind is still fresh. Or start with something easy may get the ball rolling.
- Break large assignments into smaller chunks and schedule time for each piece.
- Keep homework, study materials and reading assignments in the backpack to work on during unexpected down-time, like in the dentist's waiting room or while on the school bus.





## Help Your Teen Develop Good Study Habits

Developing good study habits doesn't come naturally to everybody. Here are some ways to help your teenager.

- Find the right place to study. Your teen may need absolute quiet to focus, or they may do better with background noise. Encourage them to try different environments—their bedroom, the kitchen, the public library—to find the place where they feel most comfortable.
- Stock the study area (or backpack) with everything your teen needs.
- Remind your student to turn off the phone and all social media so as not to get distracted.
- Encourage your teen to create a routine. Study at the same time in the same place, if possible.

In addition, remind your teen to:

- Map out or diagram concepts.
- Underline passages using colored highlighters.
- Make study cards or flash cards.
- Apply the material in different ways. Use vocabulary words in sentences. Practice math formulas in different equations.
- Think up essay questions and answer them.

## Taming Test Anxiety

A case of nerves before a test can help motivate your student to study. But too much anxiety can get in the way. Share this tips with your teen:

- Get extra help early on in subjects or areas you have trouble with.
- Set aside time each day to study. Don't try to cram a semester's worth of studying into the night before a test.
- Get plenty of sleep. Lack of sleep can make it hard to concentrate.
- Eat a healthy meal or snack before your test. The nutrients will fuel your brain during the test and keep hunger at bay.
- Take deep breaths if you feel anxious. This will relax and calm you.
- Learn from your mistakes. When you get your graded test back, study any wrong answers so you'll know what areas to work on.



## Resources

The College Board  
[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

Great Schools  
[www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org)

National Education Association  
[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)



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