To motivate your teen, keep your expectations high—and realistic

High school is a time for students to explore new subjects and ideas, and think about what they may want to do in the future. All parents want their children to succeed—and teens usually want to be successful. But what if you and your teen don’t have the same idea of success?

Studies show that parents’ high expectations for their teens’ academic achievement can motivate the students to do better and complete more years of school. But it is critical that expectations also be realistic.

To motivate your high schooler this year, keep in mind that:

• Your teen’s dreams for himself may be different from your dreams for him. Support his interests as much as you can. But also encourage him to challenge himself and keep his options open.

• No one is an expert at everything. Celebrate your teen’s strengths. In areas where he struggles, focus more on his efforts than on the result. Let him know you expect him to try his best.

• Your teen is an individual. Avoid comparing him to others. Questions like, “Why can’t you make A’s like your sister did?” will only cause friction. Let your teen know you believe he can succeed.


Focus on attendance from the start

One of the most helpful habits you can help your teen develop in high school is regular, on-time attendance—and now is the time to start. Your teen’s attendance in September can set a pattern for the year.

A study conducted in Baltimore found that students who missed two to four days of school in September were five times more likely to be chronically absent the rest of the year than students who missed fewer days.

To establish a positive pattern:

• Discuss the importance of punctual attendance with your teen. If she didn’t show up to her job, she’d get fired. Be clear that school is her most important job.

• Avoid scheduling appointments for your teen during school hours.

• Communicate with teachers. If your teen must miss school, find out how to make sure she stays on track.


Check off important basics

Do these three things now to help your teen have the best possible school year:

1. Meet your teen’s teachers. Set the tone for teamwork.

2. Check with his counselor to make sure that your teen is on track to graduate.

3. Collect key school phone numbers (the office, the attendance line, etc.). Keep them where you can find them easily.

Revive reading with a goal

Reading for pleasure builds reading skills, but as students get older, fewer of them do it. Teens responding to one survey put reading in 11th place as a leisure activity, behind such pastimes as watching TV, social networking and playing digital games.

If your teen has stopped reading for fun:

• Challenge her to set a pleasure reading goal for the school year. Agree on a suitable reward for meeting her goal.

• Help her find appealing books. Suggest that she check out the Young Adult Library Services Association’s 2018 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (niswc.com/yalsalist).


Next steps for class notes

Taking notes in class helps teens stay engaged. But what they do with their notes later also matters. Encourage your teen to:

• Review daily. As your teen rereads his notes, he can clarify them or add questions in the margins.

• Summarize. Summarizing his notes helps your teen identify the most important points.

Routines provide structure for homework success

Help your teen create a homework routine that will teach her to manage her time and take responsibility for her own learning. Encourage your student to:

- **Choose a homework time.** A regular time helps your teen settle down to work. Let her find a time that works best for her.
- **Find a well-lit,** distraction-free place to study. She should keep supplies handy.
- **Get organized.** Your teen should have a system for keeping track of assignments and papers, and a calendar for recording due dates, test dates and commitments.

Fight phone ‘addiction’

Teens love their cell phones. But excess use of mobile devices can negatively affect learning, and it has been linked to depression in teens. To help your teen monitor and limit his usage responsibly, have him:

- **Spend a day** tracking his phone use.
- **Brainstorm ways** to reduce his phone time, such as turning off notifications.
- **Set phone-free times**—during meals and homework time, while driving, etc.

Plan ways to spend quality time with your teen

If you are like many high school parents, you don’t get as much time with your teen as you used to. But quality time with you is just as vital as ever to your teen’s learning. To make the most of your time together:

- **Ask your teen** to help you plan a family outing.
- **Let her choose** a book you’ll both read. Discuss it while you share a snack.
- **Do a household project** with her.

Q&A

Senior stress is affecting my teen. How can I help?

Q: My daughter is a senior this year. I thought she would be excited, but she seems stressed about the future. What can I do to relieve her anxiety and help her have a happy senior year?

A: Your teen is facing big changes ahead. By this time next year she may be leaving home and living on her own. The process of separation isn’t always easy. Uncertainty about life after high school is a common source of anxiety for teens—and parents.

To ease this stress, help your daughter make plans and take actions to move toward a bright future:

- **If your teen wants to go to college,** check in with her school counselor to make sure she is taking the classes that she will need for admission. Your teen should be finalizing her list of prospective schools. Help her schedule plenty of time on her calendar to fill out applications.
- **If she won’t be going** to a four-year college next year, help her plan what she will be doing. Many community colleges and technical schools offer one- and two-year programs that will help her qualify for a good job.

Whatever your teen’s plans, spend lots of time with her this year. Involve her in your household tasks, so she’ll feel competent to do them herself. Do some special things together. Next year, you will be glad you did.

Are you helping your teen sleep well?

Experts say that teens need at least eight to 10 hours of sleep every 24 hours to function at their best. But more than 40 percent of teens get less than seven. Are you helping your teen get enough sleep? Answer yes or no below:

1. **Have you set** an electronics curfew, so that your teen will go to bed instead of spending time online or watching TV?
2. **Do you encourage** healthy habits, such as daily exercise?
3. **Do you suggest** that your teen take a short “power nap” after school?
4. **Do you help** your teen manage his time so he doesn’t have to stay up late?
5. **Do you limit** your teen’s late-night activities?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen get the rest he needs to do well in school. For each no, try that idea.

Source: “More teens than ever aren’t getting enough sleep,” Science Daily, niswc.com/sleepyteen.

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