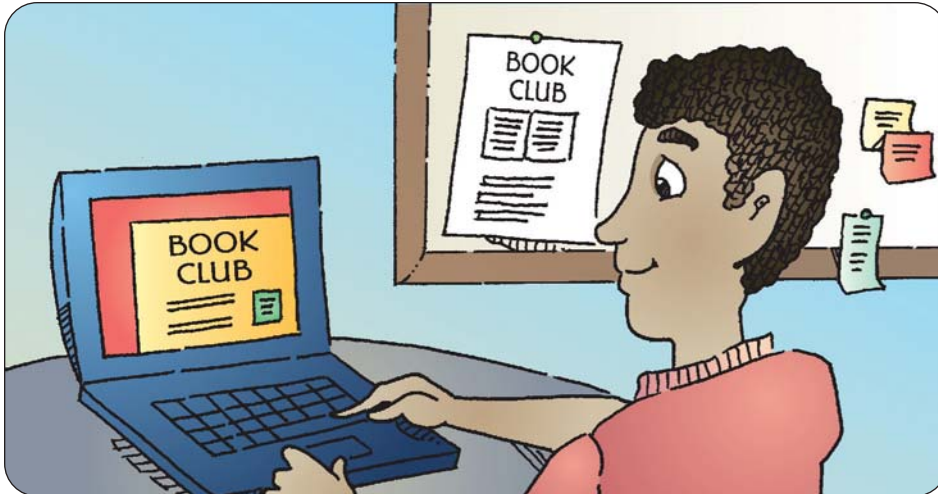


# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

October 2009  
Vol. 17, No. 2

A Service of the Newton County Schools

*still make the difference!*



## Build your teen's vocabulary, reading skills with a book club

Your teen reads—he's reading Jane Austen's *Emma* for English class. And he spent an hour reading his biology textbook last night.

So why is reading for pleasure so important to make time for? When teens read for fun, they're not stressing about memorizing every detail for an upcoming test. They're enjoying what they're reading, and likely reading faster.

Teens who are able to read quickly also understand more of what they read. Their reading comprehension improves and their vocabularies grow—and these benefits carry over into success in school-related reading as well as on those important standardized tests.

But how can your teen make time to read for pleasure? Suggest that he start a book club. Not only will he be

reading for fun, but he'll also be *having* fun. Have your teen:

- **Get the word out.** Call friends, put up flyers at school or send out an email. Aim for eight to 12 people—with more than 12, it can be difficult for everyone's opinion to be heard.
- **Set rules.** Discuss how the group will choose books to read. Talk about how often (and where) to meet.
- **Enjoy reading.** Book clubs should be fun—it's okay to joke about how the main character's teacher is exactly like Mr. Smith in the math department. Just keep the focus on the book—not the latest rumor circulating the school.

Source: "Book Clubs and Reading Guides: Starting a Book Club," [Teenreads.com](http://Teenreads.com), [www.teenreads.com/clubs/club-about.asp#Starting](http://www.teenreads.com/clubs/club-about.asp#Starting).

## Review goals, expectations for high school



Now is a great time to review your goals and expectations for your teen. Discuss how school is going

so far and talk with your teen about setting new goals. Ask:

- "How do you think you're doing in your classes?" If she's struggling, what can she do to get back on track?
- "What activities do you want to pursue—in school and beyond?" What can she do now to get on the right path?
- "How is your life outside of school?" Is she happy with how she spends her free time?

Listen to your teen's answers and then, be sure to:

- **Keep expectations high.** Let your teen know that you expect her to do her best.
- **Stay realistic.** Students can be strong in some subjects, but not others. It may not be appropriate to expect your teen to raise a grade to an A.
- **Offer your support.** Let your teen know you believe in her, and want to help her reach her goals.

Source: Peter Benson and others, *What Teens Need to Succeed*, ISBN: 1-57542-027-9 (Free Spirit Publishing, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## Create a schedule, guidelines for use of the family computer



Jake has a history project to work on. Madison needs to do some research for her fifth-grade science project.

And you need to do some last-minute work before a meeting tomorrow.

In most families, there's one computer to share. And a shared computer means shared responsibility. Here are some things to keep in mind when you divide up the available time on the family computer:

- **Have a basic schedule.** There may be some easy ways to schedule computer use. Madison gets the computer when Jake is at practice. He can go online after her bedtime. But to avoid fights that start with, "It's my turn," write down a basic schedule and put it near the computer.
- **Decide on safety measures.** Computers crash. Kids download

games that have viruses. So plan for the inevitable. Buy a portable storage device for each person in the family and get everyone in the habit of backing up their work at least once a day.

- **Create an acceptable-use policy.** Because one person's download can affect the entire family, be sure your kids know what is—and isn't—allowed. Let your kids help create the family's computer use policy. That way, they'll be more likely to follow it.

Source: Elizabeth James and Carol Barkin, *How to be School Smart: Super Study Skills*, ISBN: 0-688-16130-8 (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, www.williammorrow.com).

**We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.**

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

## Help your teen learn to keep promises, honor commitments



A huge part of being responsible is actually doing what you say you're going to do.

To effectively do that for others, kids first have to learn to do it for themselves.

Here are some things your teen can do to help her keep the promises she makes to herself. Have your teen:

- **Do what she's been putting off.** Not everything, just *one* thing. She should write down one thing that's been on her to-do list for at least a week and do it today. It may be finishing a rough draft for a paper, picking up the clothes on the floor

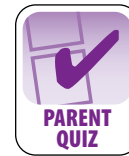
of her closet or writing and sending a thank-you note for a present.

- **Take one step** toward a healthier lifestyle. The key is to pick *one* thing. Your teen may say she will get up early, have a healthy breakfast, exercise for an hour and skip snacks at school. Well, that would be great. But not so realistic. Encourage her to just start with the healthy breakfast and make it a habit first.

Be a good role model for your teen and keep a few of the promises you have made to yourself, too.

Source: Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, ISBN: 0-684-85609-3 (Fireside, www.simonandschuster.com).

## Are you helping your distracted teen stay focused?



Teens today face all sorts of distractions. They try to watch TV, send text messages to their friends, and listen to music—all

while studying for tomorrow's history exam. Are you doing what you can to help your teen concentrate? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make family dinners** and study time distraction-free? No Facebook or text messaging!
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you provide** as much structure as possible in your home life?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage your teen** to think *before* he makes a decision? He can write pluses and minuses for each option.
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you suggested your teen** sit in the front of the class so it's easier to block out distractions from other students?
- \_\_\_ **5. Does your teen** have a planner to write down all assignments?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you're helping your teen stay focused on what's really important. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

**High School Parents**  
still make the difference!

*Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.* ISSN: 1523-1291

For subscription information call or write:

The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-  
7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2009 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares. Writers:

Kris Amundson & Jennifer McGovern.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Help your teen succeed in math, science by changing attitudes



Many of the highest-paying jobs in the future will require a working knowledge of math and science. But many

students, especially girls, think these subjects are too hard. As a result, they take only the minimum number of classes. As a result, they are shut out from many great jobs.

Parents can start to change those attitudes. A study by the University of Wisconsin found that parents play a crucial role in helping girls feel confident that they can tackle math and science. Parent support, in fact, is the most important support for girls who do go on in math and science.

Here are some ways you can encourage your teen to do her best in math and science:

- **Expect her to succeed.** Girls need to learn that they can—and must—master these important

subjects. Send the message that you know she can do it. If she's having trouble with a math problem, say, "Stick with it. You'll get it if you keep at it."

- **Assume she's interested** in math and science. Open the hood of the car and show her how the engine works. Ask her to make a budget for your next trip to the grocery store. Challenge her with logic puzzles. All these activities involve math and science.
- **Don't protect her from mistakes.** Often, girls are overly protected in the lab and at home by parents who don't want them to experience failure. Instead, recognize that sometimes girls need the chance to make big, interesting mistakes.

Source: "Tracking the Reason Many Girls Avoid Science and Math," Science Daily, [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080905153807.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080905153807.htm).

# Build your teen's character with a positive volunteer experience



To build your teen's character, encourage him to take some time to volunteer. Teens who volunteer regularly:

- **Are less likely** to use drugs.
- **Are less likely** to be sexually active.
- **Are more likely** to develop a strong work ethic.
- **Are more likely** to be active participants in their communities as adults.
- **Are gaining** important skills and experiences that can be listed on college applications or résumé.

To help your teen have a good volunteering experience:

- **Discuss your teen's strengths** and interests. Help your teen find a cause he feels strongly about. Review his schedule, too. If your teen has a lot of free time, volunteering regularly at the local animal shelter may be right for him. If his schedule is pretty full, he could participate in a volunteer program from home (sending care packages to troops overseas).
- **Encourage your teen** to stay committed. Remind him that volunteering is like a job—he has to show up when he says he will.

Source: Jamie Littlefield, "Teen Volunteerism: How to Promote a Positive Volunteer Experience," About.com: Teens, <http://parentingteens.about.com>.

**Q:** How can I tell if my son has a drinking problem? He stopped spending time with his old friends and now hangs around with an older crowd. They are poor students, and I suspect they drink.

I work during the day, but lately I have the feeling that he and his friends may be in the house during school hours when I'm away. His grades are dropping and he doesn't want to go to school in the morning.

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Your instincts are probably right. The description of your son includes many of the warning signs that he may in fact have a problem with alcohol or drugs. In order to know for sure, you can:

- **Talk with your son.** Be sure he knows that drug and alcohol use are unacceptable in your family. Help him see that continuing to use alcohol or drugs will prevent him from achieving his goals—whether they are to go to college, join the military or get a good job.
- **Supervise him more closely.** Insist that he tell you where he's going and who he'll be with. Don't be afraid to tell him he can't associate with certain kids.
- **Talk to your neighbors** if you can't be home during the day. Ask them to contact you if they ever see your teen at home when he should be at school.
- **Talk to the school.** Ask them to call you at work (so you are sure to get the message) if your son skips class.
- **Consider getting help** for yourself. Groups like Al-Anon can help you learn ways to deal with your son's alcohol problems.

—Kristen Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Discipline

## Five ways to help your teen develop self-discipline



DISCIPLINE

You don't want to nag your teen. And she certainly doesn't want you to nag her about homework every day.

But how can parents help teens develop the self-discipline they need to take responsibility for themselves? Here are five ways to help your teen become more self-disciplined:

- 1. Don't rescue.** Let your teen experience the consequences of her actions. If she puts off writing the paper, don't type it for her. Remember—your goal as a parent is to work yourself out of a job!
- 2. Stick to a single word.** Teens have short attention spans. Using a single word—"dishes" or "homework" is more likely to get through.
- 3. Expect her to be a contributing member of the family.** Teens who have responsibilities at home begin to see themselves as important members of the family team.
- 4. Give your teen a say.** Let her set her own study schedule. When she shows she can do that, let her take on more responsibility.
- 5. Pick your battles.** Not everything is worth fighting about. Decide on the issues and values that are most important to you. Let other things go.

Source: Diane Wolfe, "Help Your Teenager Develop Self-Discipline," Canadian Parents, [www.ims.issaquah.wednet.edu/Teachers/counseling/Parenting/Helping%20Your%20Teen%20Develop%20Self%20Discipline.pdf](http://www.ims.issaquah.wednet.edu/Teachers/counseling/Parenting/Helping%20Your%20Teen%20Develop%20Self%20Discipline.pdf).

## Determine when to stand firm, when to be flexible with rules

**R**ules work best when they are consistently enforced. But that doesn't mean you can't bend them occasionally if it will benefit your relationship with your teen.

Think about putting your rules in one of three groups:

- 1. Group A.** These rules are absolutely firm. This group should contain only a few rules. Most of these should have to do with your teen's safety, like: Never drink and drive.
- 2. Group B.** These rules can be flexible, if agreed upon in advance. For example, your teen may be excused from a curfew for a special event, such as for the prom.
- 3. Group C.** These rules are the most flexible. Here, your teen can make the choice as long as it does not infringe on the rights of



others. For example, she can play whatever music she likes. But if the noise level interferes with the activities of others, she'll need to turn it down.

Source: Donald E. Greydanus, M.D., *The American Academy of Pediatrics: Caring for Your Adolescent, Ages 12 to 21*, ISBN: 0-553-07556-X (Bantam Books, [www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell](http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell)).

## Make sure your discipline routine is right for your teen



YOUR TEEN AND YOU

Teens need help navigating their way to adulthood—and that's where discipline comes in. Discipline helps teens learn how to make the right moral choices and shows them the importance of a strong work ethic.

To ensure your discipline routine is right for your teen:

- **Review your rules every year.** Make sure they grow with your teen—an 8 p.m. curfew won't work for a 17-year-old with a part-time job who is often scheduled to work until 9 p.m.

- **Talk to your teen.** As he grows older, he's likely to want to rebel against the rules. If a certain rule is causing friction between the two of you, explain why you set it. Ask what his problem with it is. But remember—as the parent, you always get the final say.
- **Trust your teen.** You can't always be there to make decisions for him, but you can believe that he has learned how to do the right thing.

Source: "Discipline (teens)," Parenting SA, Government of South Australia Children, Youth and Women's Health Service, [www.parenting.sa.gov.au/pegs/peg37.pdf](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au/pegs/peg37.pdf).