

Helping Students Learn®

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10



October 2025

Help your teen establish habits for managing digital media use

With the digital world in their pockets, it is vital that teens develop healthy habits for managing their use of it. Too much recreational digital media use is linked to negative effects on well-being and academic achievement—and in a recent survey, nearly half of teens reported using their phones constantly.



Help your teen:

- **Understand that digital media** is designed to be hard to resist. A “like” on social media or reaching a new level in a game feels like a reward. Algorithms feed similar content to keep people passively scrolling. Fear of missing out plays a role, too—a lot can happen online in just minutes, spurring the desire to stay connected. Encourage your teen to resist this by turning off notifications and setting specific times to play games or check messages and posts.
- **Be purposeful about screen use.** Teens often reach for their phones because they feel bored, lonely or uncomfortable. Help your teen recognize these situations and choose healthier alternatives, like reading, talking to a friend or taking a walk. Teens also turn to digital media to procrastinate when it's time to do schoolwork, so have your teen set a timer when picking up a device. When it goes off, it's time to get to work.

Source: M. Faverio and O. Sidoti, “Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024,” Pew Research Center; “Protecting Youth Mental Health,” The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory.



Effort leads to success with math

Many students—and adults—are intimidated by math. But it is something all students can learn. The keys to success with math are effort and practice.

Encourage your teen to put these math strategies to work:

- **Attend every class.** Math learning builds on itself from day to day. Missing even one class can make it tough to keep up.
- **Ask questions right away** to clear up confusion. And chances are, if your teen is confused, others in the class are, too.
- **Take notes in class** and review them each evening. Then, your teen can write down questions that arise to ask in the next class.
- **Schedule enough time** to keep up with assignments and complete them by their due dates.
- **Practice solving problems** from prior assignments, quizzes and tests. This will keep the steps fresh in your teen’s mind.
- **Form a study group.** What confuses your teen may be something a classmate can explain.

Make winding down easier

You’ve set a reasonable bedtime, but your teen says it’s too early to be able to fall asleep. Encourage your teen to:

- **Relax before bed** with screen-free activities.
- **Avoid caffeine.**
- **Exercise daily**—but not right before bedtime.



Suggest thinking activities

School-based extracurricular activities offer fun ways for your teen to strengthen thinking skills and a connection to school. Suggest that your teen try:

- **Making music.** Student musicians think about order, rhythm and patterns.
- **Blogging** or podcasting for a school media outlet.
- **Debating.** Teens love to argue. In debate club, your teen can earn points doing it. No club? Perhaps your teen can start one.



The future is coming soon!

In every year of high school, there are things your student can do to prepare to graduate and move on to career training or college. Review this partial list together:

- **Ninth graders** can join school activities of interest and meet with a counselor to create a four-year plan of classes.
- **Tenth graders** can learn about careers of interest and the education required. They can take online tours of schools, and learn about sources of financial aid.
- **Eleventh graders** can check the requirements for admission to schools or programs of interest, and make sure that the classes they are taking meet them.
- **Twelfth graders** can chart application and financial aid deadlines, and make plans to meet them.



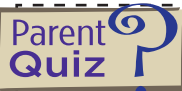
How can I keep anxiety from getting in my teen's way?

Q: My teen feels a lot of anxiety about school. Worry about failing tests leads to late night cramming and then poor performance. Social anxiety is an issue, too. My teen has done other people's work on group projects—just to be liked. How can I help?

A: Anxiety is the most common mental health condition affecting teens today. And it is causing your student to make school life harder than it needs to be. Talk to your teen about it. Say you are concerned and want to help. Then, to ease the stress that comes with anxiety:



- **Help your teen put things into perspective.** Not everything needs to be perfect. Discuss times when "good enough" really is just that.
- **Discuss study structure.** Encourage your teen to start studying for tests several days in advance and to take breaks after every hour of studying. Share that getting a good night's sleep helps consolidate information in students' minds, making it easier to recall information and do well.
- **Agree that your teen can use you as an excuse** for not taking on other people's responsibilities. "Sorry, I can't—my family needs my help this weekend."
- **Monitor your teen's behavior.** Anxious students sometimes self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. Seek professional help if needed.



Are you helping your teen face challenges?

As the school year moves along, some students will run up against difficulty learning the material in one class—or several. Are you fostering your teen's ability to overcome obstacles? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** how things are going at school regularly, and ask if your teen has any concerns about classes?
- ___ **2. Do you tell** your teen to ask teachers as soon as possible about ways to get extra help?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your teen establish positive study daily habits, such as sticking to a study time, setting priorities and reviewing notes?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your teen find videos online that explain challenging concepts?

- ___ **5. Do you consult** with your teen's teacher or counselor if the issues continue?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making it easier for your teen to get back on track. For each no, try that idea.

"Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional."

—Roger Crawford

Teach behavior by example

To teach your teen to behave respectfully, demonstrate what respectful behavior looks like. In interactions with your teen:

- **Be fair.** Don't pass judgment or impose a consequence without learning all the facts. Listen carefully to your teen's side of the story.
- **Be constructive** when your teen makes a mistake. Talk about what to do instead.
- **Be reliable.** If you tell your teen you will do something, do it.
- **Be accountable.** Apologize for your errors, and explain what you will do to avoid them in the future.

Keep up the good work!

Anti-vaping efforts by schools and families have led to a recent decline in e-cigarette use by teens. But many high school students are still active users.



Make sure your teen knows that:

- **Most vapes contain nicotine—**sometimes more than in cigarettes—which is addictive and especially harmful to teens' developing brains.
- **Vaping is against your rules.** Role-play ways to say *no*.

Source: A. Jamal and others, "Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2024," CDC.

Cheating is always wrong

Technology has made cheating easier, and many students don't view it as a serious offense—but it is. Explain to your teen that cheaters are stealing work and lying by saying it is their own (even if it was produced by artificial intelligence). They also cheat themselves of the knowledge they would gain by learning the material. Cheaters risk severe penalties—including failing the class.

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