Successful group projects

Group projects are not only a regular part of high school today, they’re an excellent way to prepare your teen for college and a career.

Working with other students gives him valuable experience communicating, negotiating, and solving problems while exploring a topic in depth. Here are pointers to help him build collaboration skills.

Pick wisely
If the teacher doesn’t assign groups, your high schooler should choose people he feels he can work well with and whose strengths complement his. For example, a strong researcher may want to partner with a student who is a creative designer. Remind him that close friends may not be the right fit.

Lay the framework
Your teen could suggest that the group agree on the best times and places to work together. At the first meeting, members can divvy up parts and list resources they’ll need (library books, maps, poster board). They might also set up a way to report their progress between meetings, such as texting daily or using a file-sharing site. This will help ensure that each person does his part.

Create a timeline
Setting deadlines will keep everyone on track. Your child could encourage group members to estimate how long their piece will take. Then, the group can build a schedule leading up to the due date. Tip: They’ll need to leave time to put everyone’s contributions (bibliography, charts) into the finished project.

Foreign-language fun
Give your teenager a playful twist on practicing her foreign language with these ideas.

- Create a playlist. Suggest that she find songs in the language she’s studying, perhaps online or at the library. While she listens, she will pick up words she knows and discover new ones. Plus, she’ll hear how to properly pronounce words.
- Act it out. Encourage her to act out a scene from her favorite movie, saying the dialogue in the language she’s learning. She’ll work on translation and speaking skills as she puts on her skit.
Ace that interview

Your teen may be eager to gain work experience and make money through summer work. Help her wow prospective employers by sharing these interview basics.

**Getting ready...**

- Look up directions to the business. Plan to arrive at least 10 minutes early.
- Think about how your experiences make you the ideal candidate for the job. Example: Being on your school debate team requires a clear speaking voice—a must for answering office phones.

**History now and then**

The word “history” may make your teen think of ancient times and people he never knew. Make the past more personal by encouraging him to explore your family’s yesteryear. Try these hands-on projects together.

**Do a family history—digitally.** Free audio recorders let family members tape themselves reading their life stories (check out [audacity.sourceforge.net](http://audacity.sourceforge.net)). You can save the sound files for listening to years down the road. Or you might make multimedia scrapbooks with pictures, sound, and video.

**Find out what’s in a name.** Have everyone research their first names, including origins and meanings (use sites like [behindthename.com](http://behindthename.com)). Explain why you chose your child’s name—and where your own name came from.

**Talk about heirlooms.** Special items handed down from one generation to another can take many forms (jewelry, books, clothing, furniture). Let each person pick an item to ask older relatives about. Then, share what you discover.

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**Standardized test time**

**Q & A**

**Q** My son is nervous about the upcoming standardized tests. How can I help?

**A** Feeling confident and ready will go a long way toward soothing your son’s nerves. Make sure he’s in school for any test prep days, and suggest that he practice at home with sample questions or old tests. All of this will make him feel more confident when test day arrives.

On that day, have him eat a balanced breakfast, arrive at school on time, and bring any supplies he may need, such as a calculator, extra batteries, or pencils.

Finally, go over any test-taking tips his teachers send home. For instance, he should begin each test by reading directions and questions completely before answering. For multiple-choice questions, he can eliminate answers that are obviously wrong. And for essays, he should jot down an outline before he starts to write.

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**Parent to Parent**

**No complaints!**

When my daughter Anna walked in the door after school, she would automatically start talking about all the bad things that had happened that day. Calculus was confusing, a friend annoyed her, and the bus was late. Her frustration soured everyone’s mood.

To improve her outlook, I told her I wanted her to start telling me one good thing about her day before she mentioned a bad one. I explained that her complaints were not a fun way to be greeted when I hadn’t seen her all day. And while I wanted her to share her feelings, she needed to focus on positive things to put negative ones in perspective.

Anna seems more aware now of when she starts to complain. In fact, if she’s on the verge of venting when she walks in the door, she usually catches herself and thinks of something good to say first.