Discuss grades often

Make a point of regularly talking with your high schooler about his grades. That way, you won't be surprised when report cards come out. You can ask if he's struggling with any courses and discuss how he could get help. Be sure to praise good or improved grades, too.

Only about one-third of teens hold a job today, compared with just over half in 1979. Having a job will teach your child responsibility, and it will look great on college and future job applications. For her to stand out from the crowd when looking for work, suggest that she create a resume, practice interview skills, and dress neatly for the in-person meeting.

If your teen has an Individualized Education Program, he can take more responsibility for it as he gets older. Encourage him to review his IEP with his school counselor. They can talk over changes that would help him, such as more time on tests or using speech-to-text software. Letting him advocate for his own needs prepares your teen to speak up in the future.

“ar I have decided to be happy because it is good for my health.” Voltaire

Just for fun

Q: What do lazy dogs do for fun?
A: Chase parked cars.

The language of respect

Build a family culture of respect by using a kind tone with your teenager and encouraging her to do the same. You can tell her, “It's not just what you say but also how you say it.” Consider these suggestions.

Hold your high schooler accountable for her words and actions. If she says or does something disrespectful, let her know that it is not acceptable—and that you won't respond or do what she (unkindly) asked.

Try this: “What you just said was disrespectful. I'll listen when you speak nicely.”

When your teenager reaches out to you for advice, respond respectfully. Taking her questions or concerns seriously will help her feel comfortable coming to you in the future without fear of being criticized or judged.

Try this: “I'm here to help any way I can. And if I don't know how, we can find the answer together.”

Do you or your teen sometimes act like there's only one right way (your way)? You can model respectful behavior by showing that you value her point of view even if you disagree with it. Then, remind her to respect your opinion, too.

Try this: “I respect what you have to say. Please explain what you're thinking.”

Boost vocabulary

There's a word for that! When your high schooler has a strong vocabulary, he will write and speak with more confidence. Share these vocabulary-building tips.

■ Review daily. He might spend 15 minutes a day studying vocabulary from his classes. To cement the meanings in his mind, he could think of synonyms (words with similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings) for each one.

■ Read widely. The more your teen reads, the more he's exposed to unfamiliar words. Keep magazines, newspapers, novels, and nonfiction books around the house and in the car for easy access.

■ Practice context. Using new words in a sentence helps boost understanding. Encourage your teenager to use the words during dinner conversation—and to explain what they mean if they're new to you.
Homework success

Your teen can improve his homework routine with these three strategies.

1. Plan it out. Scheduling is an important first step. When will he complete homework? Have your teenager write on a calendar all his regular activities (drama club, tennis team practice) and commitments (babysitting a sibling). If there is not a free block of time every day for homework, he'll need to cut back. Note: Suggest that he review his schedule regularly and make adjustments if he's having trouble finishing his assignments.

2. Take a bite-sized approach. Does your high schooler know where to begin with long-term projects? He could hone his planning skills by breaking up bigger projects into smaller parts. With a long essay, for example, he can tackle each task (create an outline, do research) on a different day.

3. Get a support system. If your teen lines up help ahead of time, he’ll avoid a last-minute panic the night before an assignment is due. He should have at least one “homework buddy” from each class to reach out to. And remind him that his teachers are happy to answer questions. Many are available before and after classes or at lunchtime.

Dangers of opioids

Q A student at my daughter's high school almost died of an opioid overdose. Luckily, he received the antidote naloxone in time. But with so many kids trying opioids, I'm worried. What can I do?

A You've already taken an important first step by being aware of this problem.

Using the student's overdose as a teachable moment, talk with your daughter about the dangers of drug use—especially the addictive and deadly nature of opioids. If you have any reason to suspect your teenager is using drugs, seek professional help at once.

Explain to your teen that even though naloxone can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, that doesn't make it okay—or safe—to use opioids. The antidote doesn't cure a person's addiction or prevent future overdoes. Also, naloxone must be given right away by someone who knows how to use it.

Pursuing a high-tech career

If your high schooler loves technology, she might consider making it into a future career. These resources can help her get started.

School clubs

Encourage her to join an after-school STEM club. She'll meet like-minded students and be able to work on activities like creating a video game or learning how to use 3-D printers. Your teen's school might offer a coding club, robotics team, or computer science club.

Groups

Several nonprofits help young people learn about STEM careers through summer programs, online learning, contests, scholarships, and internships. Four to check out: girlswhocode.com, code.org, iridescentlearning.org, and techprep.fb.com.

DIY learning

Your teen can teach herself tech skills with free online resources. For example, she could create a website using WordPress, learn to code on Codecademy, or build an app with MIT App Inventor.

Follow the news

My son, Juan, didn't pay attention to the news at all. I wanted him to know what was going on in the world, so I tried a few simple things.

For starters, we now listen to the TV news while we're getting ready for school and work, and I'll put on news radio when we're in the car together.

We make it a family habit to discuss current events at dinner, too. This has presented some good opportunities to talk about telling fact from fiction. When Juan brought up a funny-but-false online meme, we discussed how important it is to get information from credible sources.

Then on Sundays, we read the newspaper together and share our favorite articles. Juan is getting a much clearer view of the news now—and we're getting a chance to talk more about what's going on.
Set teen-friendly boundaries

As your teenager inches toward adulthood, you want to keep him safe—and prepare him to make good decisions when he’s on his own. Use these strategies to create rules that work for both of you.

Cast your ballot
Talk to your high schooler about this month’s general election, and explain how you decided who to vote for. If he’s old enough to vote (a big milestone for teenagers!), head to the polling place together. Voting for different candidates? Show your child that it’s possible to disagree respectfully.

Integrity matters
Notice when your teen does the right thing—especially when it would have been easy to do the opposite. Maybe she finds a $5 bill in the laundry and tries to find out which family member it belongs to. Tell her that she showed integrity by not pocketing the cash herself.

Worth quoting
“A goal is a dream with a deadline.”
Napoleon Hill

Check the “fit”
Rules and limits can grow with your child as he gets older. An old rule such as no dating could change to group dating only and eventually to allowing one-on-one dating. Or a weekend curfew that was right for him as a tween might be an hour or so later now that he’s a teenager. Revisit your rules as he displays more (or less) maturity and responsibility.

Keep consequences logical
Let your teen experience the real-life consequences of breaking a rule. For example, if he comes home late and is tired the next morning, avoid letting him sleep in. If he gets a speeding ticket, have him pay it, along with any increase in your car insurance. He may think twice the next time he’s tempted to stay out late or drive too fast.

Attending parent-teacher conferences
Meeting with your high schooler’s teachers helps to set your teen up for success. Here are good reasons to attend fall conferences:

- You’ll get first-hand information on how your teenager is doing. For a productive meeting, list any questions and concerns ahead of time. Refer to your list during the meeting to make sure you cover everything.

- You can share insights on any problems at school or home that might affect your teen’s performance. For example, dealing with divorce or chronic illness could cause her to struggle with schoolwork or behavior.

Tip: If your high schooler attends the conference, encourage her to ask questions, share her goals, and say if she needs help in a particular area.
The right college for me

Your teen wants to attend college. Great! Now, which one is right for her? She can narrow it down with these steps.

1. Create a wish list. What does your child want in her ideal college? Have her make a list of must-haves, such as "strong engineering program" and "affordable." Suggest that she also include nice-to-have features like "in a big city" or "warm climate."

2. Do research. The best place to start is with her school counselor. Then, she could read college brochures and websites and attend college fairs. When possible, visit college campuses together. She might also get insight by talking to current students or recent graduates.

3. Make a spreadsheet. Encourage your high schooler to turn her wish list into a decision-making tool. She can list the features down the first column. As she considers schools, she should create a column for each one and check the appropriate boxes. She'll see at a glance which colleges are good matches for her.

Q&A

Smarter study skills

Q: My son seems to spend a lot of time studying without really getting anywhere. How can he work more efficiently?

A: Encourage your teen to experiment with different study methods to figure out which ones work best for him. For instance, he might record himself reading textbooks or notes and then listen while he works out. Or maybe he'll make a video of himself explaining a science concept or a math procedure. If he and his friends each film a video, they could share them with each other.

Does he like to draw? Suggest that he create a comic strip based on a historical event or a novel. Or if he enjoys music, perhaps he'll make up a song or a jingle to help him remember important terms or dates.

Parent to Parent

Talking about sexual harassment

With sexual harassment in the headlines these days, I realized I needed to talk to my son and daughter about this difficult topic.

We discussed the types of inappropriate behavior mentioned in news articles, such as unwanted touching, unwelcome comments about people's bodies, and pressure to do things that make you uncomfortable.

We also talked about ways to handle harassment, like finding a trusted friend or calling me for a ride if something happens at a party or on a date. If harassment takes place at school, they should tell the counselor or another trusted adult.

Although this subject wasn't easy to bring up, I'm glad I started the conversation. I plan to keep reminding my children about the importance of respecting other people's bodies and decisions—and about speaking up for themselves if they feel pressured or uncomfortable.

Look at data carefully

The claim: People who own orange cats eat more pizza than those who own black cats.

The reality: The color of your cat and the amount of pizza you eat are totally unrelated.

Yet your teen can probably find a graph to support claims as outrageous as that one. Consider holding a "family graph night" where everyone can see that just because a graph indicates a relationship, it doesn't mean that one factor causes another! Here's how.

1. Ask everyone to be on the lookout for newspaper or online graphs that interest them. Your high schooler might find one on clean water by country or on student loan debt by ethnicity, for instance.

2. Pass around the graphs you found, and let family members explain what they "see." What story does each graph tell?

3. Your teen will realize that you can make different arguments based on the same graph. This will get him used to thinking critically—and help him with data analysis across all subjects.
Five Steps to Financial Literacy

How your high schooler handles her money now could set the tone for a financially secure future. Use this guide to help her learn how to manage her finances by creating a budget, spending money wisely, and saving consistently.

1. Begin with a budget

Your teenager will be more financially fit if she uses a budget to track income and expenses. Suggest these strategies to help her now and to give her practice for when she lives on her own.

Find a system. Encourage your teen to make and use a format she's comfortable with. She might list income and expenses in a notebook or computer file. Or she could create a spreadsheet. Whatever she chooses, she'll need to account for money coming in (allowance, paycheck) and money going out (gas, entertainment).

Brainstorm ways to cut back. Is your high schooler spending more than she earns, or does she not have enough left for savings? Have her keep a spending log for a month to see where her money goes. Then, she can think of ideas for reducing her expenses. Maybe she'll switch to a less expensive cell phone plan or not eat out as often. She could also come up with ways to add income, such as working extra hours.

2. Pay yourself first

Saving money creates a habit that can give your child greater financial security as an adult. It also provides him with a cushion to cover unexpected expenses. Share these tips.

More ways to learn

Encourage your teenager to build financial literacy with resources like these:

- Take a personal-finance course at school.
- Join an after-school investment club where members pretend to play the stock market.
- Read the newspaper's business section.
- Borrow money-related magazines and books from the library.
- Follow financial education websites aimed at young people, such as jumpstart.org or mymoney.gov/Pages/for-youth.aspx.

Identify financial goals. Knowing what he's saving for can make it easier to follow through. Encourage your teen to write down longer-term goals (college, used car) and shorter-term goals (concert tickets, fitness tracker). Then, suggest that he figure out how much he needs to save and for how long (for a $60 concert ticket, he might set aside $15 per paycheck over four pay periods).

Save regularly. It's a good idea to put away a certain percentage (say, 10%) of his income right off the top, whether he gets money from a job, an allowance, or gifts. This will help your high schooler get used to saving first and living on what's left. You might tell him to consider saving as a fixed expense, just like a car payment or rent.

continued
3. Spend smartly

Your teenager may have more money than she did when she was younger, especially if she works part time. These strategies can help her learn to spend earnings wisely.

**Plan ahead.** Have her make a shopping list before going to the mall or a store. Or she could set a spending limit for herself and take only that much cash with her. If she's tempted to buy something not on her list or over her limit, suggest that she go home and think about the item. After a day or two, she may realize she doesn't need it.

**Learn from mistakes.** If your high schooler overspends on clothes, for example, and then can't afford to go to the movies with her friends, try not to bail her out. She'll learn best if she experiences the consequences of her actions. Plus, if you give her money once, she may continue purchasing items she can't afford and expect you to help her out again.

4. Bank on it

Opening accounts now will help your child get comfortable with banking. Suggest a checking account, as well as a savings account, so he gets practice in making online payments and tracking balances. Here's how.

**Establish accounts.** Encourage your child to shop around at various banks. He should ask how much he'll need to deposit and whether there are minimum balances or fees. **Note:** You'll need to go with him to open accounts if he's under 18, and he'll have to take along ID (birth certificate, Social Security card, or driver's license).

**Make him the monitor.** Let your high schooler know it's his job to keep tabs on his accounts. He should make it a habit to check his account online daily. That way, he can quickly see which transactions have cleared and stay on top of how much money he has in his account. **(Hint: If you're listed on his accounts, you'll be able to watch, too.)** To safeguard against identity theft, make sure he keeps his account numbers and passwords private.

5. Control credit

With proof of income or a cosigner, your child may apply for a credit card when she's 18. Before then, you could help her get experience using "plastic" so she learns to handle credit responsibly. Consider these options.

**Debit cards.** Your teenager can use a card that looks like a credit card but takes money directly out of her bank account. The benefit? She's limited to spending what she has on hand. Since any use of plastic comes with a risk of identity theft, suggest that she tie the debit card only to her checking account. She could keep a small amount there and put the rest in savings.

**Credit cards.** If you make your teen an authorized user on your credit card, she'll get a card in her name, and the charges will show up on your account. You might request a lower limit for her card—remember, you'll ultimately be liable for her spending. Also, consider being specific about what she can use the card for. Be sure she understands that she should only charge what she can pay back within a month. Otherwise, she'll wind up paying interest on the purchase price.
Getting Along with Your Teenager

When parents and teens get along, life is simpler and more pleasant for everyone. Here are common problems—and solutions for you to try.

**Speaking respectfully**

**Scenario:** Your child rolls his eyes and sighs loudly while you're talking. Or he puts down siblings and makes mean remarks.

**Ideas:** How you respond can make the difference in whether a situation escalates. If your child is rude to you, speak in a calm voice, but let him know that his behavior is not acceptable. Then, point out more respectful ways to communicate. (“Mom, I disagree with you,” rather than “I can't believe you're so mean!”) Tell him he can try again and be courteous or you will take a break and finish talking later.

If siblings are rude or speak unkindly to each other, explain that disrespectful language and insults are not okay. Here’s an easy test: If your teen wouldn’t want his sibling to speak a certain way to him, he shouldn’t speak that way to his sibling. Help your children see that using manners with each other (saying “please” and “thank you”) and speaking in a nice tone of voice will make your house more peaceful.

**Being responsible**

**Scenario:** Your teen puts off schoolwork and leaves chores undone while she’s busy texting friends or using apps on her phone. You’re aggravated that she’s not more responsible, and she says you’re always on her case.

**Ideas:** Tell your child that her main responsibility is doing her best in school, and that means homework comes first. And since all family members are expected to help take care of the home, chores must also be completed. Then, make sure she realizes that things like her cell phone and internet access are privileges, not rights, and you will take them away if she doesn’t do her part.

You can also encourage responsibility by not jumping in to rescue her if she doesn’t follow through on something (forgets to take a project to school, for example). Suffering the consequences (getting a lower grade) will help her learn a lesson so she’s more likely to be responsible next time.

**Wanting more**

**Scenario:** Your high schooler wants what his friends have: the latest gadgets and designer clothes. You don’t think he needs all these things, and you couldn’t afford them anyway. When you say no, he gets upset and says you never buy him anything.

**Ideas:** Point out what you provide for your child (housing, food, clothing, electricity). Explain that much of your money goes for these basic needs, and the rest has to be divided among savings, activities, entertainment, and other things. Tell him that he’s not entitled to extras just because he wants them. Life is about give and take, and if he wants something, he should figure out ways to get it. He might find a part-time job or save his allowance if he gets one.

continued
Avoiding the rush

Scenario: It's 7 a.m., and your teen is not ready for school yet. You yell that she should have gotten up earlier. Frustration mounts as you wait, since you have to drop her off at school on your way to work.

Ideas: Make hectic mornings calmer by helping your high schooler establish better routines. Have her go to bed earlier so she can get up earlier. Then, encourage her to do things the night before that will make mornings easier. For example, she should think about things she'll need (sports equipment, science project) and put them by the front door.

Another way to minimize morning stress is to work backward. Together, identify what time she needs to arrive somewhere (6:45 p.m. for play practice), subtract the time it takes to get there (15 minutes), and deduct time for getting out the door, parking, and walking inside (10 minutes). Whether she's catching a ride or driving herself, that's when she should be ready to go (6:20 p.m.).

Blending right in

Many teenagers live in stepfamilies or split their time between two homes. No matter what the living arrangements are in your family, peace can prevail. Try these ideas.

Stepfamilies:

- Let parents (rather than stepparents) take the lead on rules, especially at first. Your teenager will be more accepting of a stepparent who doesn't act like a disciplinarian. Stepparents can enforce rules by simply stating the rule the parent has set (“Your mom says you can't have friends in the car when you drive”). If the teen doesn't obey, the parent can apply the consequences.
- Ask your child for input when starting new family traditions for birthdays and holidays. Rather than doing away with old ways of celebrating, invite her to help create a plan that includes everyone’s ideas. She'll feel less resentful about changes if she is part of making them.
- Provide ways for your high schooler to express her feelings about the new family arrangement. You might give her a journal or have her talk to a counselor. Bottling her feelings will make her more likely to be resentful or to act out.

Shared parenting:

- Stick with consistent routines for things like meals and homework. You and your ex probably won't agree on every rule, but you should keep bigger ones the same (no smoking, no skipping classes). This provides your high schooler with stability.
- Make arrangements ahead of time for your child's activities. He can line up reliable transportation, and both sets of parents should know about performances and events. Communicating early and often will help avoid mix-ups.
- Talk positively about the other parent in front of your teen. He'll see that you view each other as people who love and support him rather than as competitors. Your high schooler will feel more secure if he sees that everyone is working together.

High School Years

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Read and Write for Success

Reading and writing play a critical role in your teenager's current and future success. They're not only skills used in every class now, they'll also be important in college, jobs, and career. To motivate your high schooler to read and write well—and have fun doing it—follow these suggestions.

Read for pleasure
The more often your teen reads (preferably every day), the better she will be at it. The good news? Any genre or topic counts! She might read novels, magazines, online articles, nonfiction books, textbooks, graphic novels, blogs, newspapers, college brochures, and infographics. Reading about different subjects (history, sports, personal finance, politics, travel, health) broadens her knowledge base—which is helpful in and out of school.

Improve comprehension
Instead of skimming quickly through his economics or chemistry textbook, your high schooler can practice “active reading” to increase his understanding. For starters, he could jump right to the end of the chapter and read the questions designed to test his comprehension. When he sees what he's supposed to know after reading the chapter, he will pay closer attention as he goes. Then, before diving into the text, he should scan headings and subheadings to find out what major ideas he'll be reading about. Finally, when he finishes each section or chapter, he might write a summary in his own words to check his comprehension. Tip: Have your teen keep paper and pencil handy while reading. He can jot down unfamiliar words to look up, note confusing passages to ask his teacher about, and write down any questions he has.

Encourage real-world writing
Beyond schoolwork, plenty of opportunities exist for real-world writing in your teenager's day-to-day life. Here are a few to share:
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper taking a stance on an issue that's important to you.
- Write reviews of books, movies, or products, and post them on a shopping or entertainment website.
- Start your own blog about a hobby or an interest like robotics or paddleboarding.
- If you run a babysitting or dog-walking business, create a flyer promoting your services.
- Choose extracurricular activities that involve writing. For instance, join the school newspaper or yearbook, or submit stories or poems to the literary magazine or poetry anthology.

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continued
Read and Write for Success

Read and write as a family

To encourage your teenager to read and write for enjoyment, bring your family together for activities like these.

Start a book club. Take turns picking a title. Give everyone time to read the book, then meet to talk about it. Ask each person to bring at least three discussion questions to the meeting, and enjoy a lively conversation. Note: Everyone doesn’t have to love the book for a good conversation. Often the most interesting book talks occur when people disagree—or didn’t even like the book!

Share a journal.
Keep a written conversation going by starting a family journal. Each week, a different person could write a thought-provoking question. Have each family member write a response. At the end of the week, read your entries aloud.

Listen to audiobooks in the car. When you drive your teen to practices, club meetings, or school activities, take advantage of your time together by listening to audiobooks. Pick a novel with a more complex plot, or choose a higher-level nonfiction book than your child usually reads. Audiobooks can teach critical listening skills, introduce new vocabulary, and allow her to hear the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words.

Play word games. From hangman to Scrabble to Words with Friends, word games never go out of style. Because they’re such a great vocabulary builder (important for reading and writing), try to squeeze wordplay into your game nights.

Create a family website. Everyone can write family news and post photos with descriptive captions to highlight the latest happenings. Appoint your teenager as editor to sharpen her proofreading and editing skills.

Write like a pro

A few simple strategies can take your teen’s writing from good to great! Suggest these tips.

Know your audience. Understanding who his reader is will help guide your high schooler’s tone and word choice. A blog post aimed at his Fantasy Football league would be informal and perhaps humorous, while an email to his boss should sound professional. Note: Both, however, need to include correct grammar and spelling.

Appeal to the senses. Good writers paint a picture in the reader’s mind by vividly describing how something looks, feels, sounds, tastes, or smells. Encourage your teenager to close his eyes and imagine a scene or an object before he writes about it.

Vary sentences. To make writing flow, writers use different sentence lengths and structures. For example, too many short sentences make writing seem choppy. Suggest that your high schooler read his writing aloud to hear how it flows and make adjustments if necessary. He might break a long sentence into two sentences, for instance, or change openings so that each sentence doesn’t begin with “The.”

Take a break. Have your teen put his writing away when he finishes a draft. Then, he can come back later to edit and proofread. Looking at his work with a fresh eye makes it easier to catch mistakes and revise his writing.

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