

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Santa Cruz Valley Union High School

HIGH SCHOOL



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## A five-day plan helps teens take an organized approach to studying

When your teen has a big test to study for—whether it's a history unit test, a math exam or an essay test in English—organization is key for effective and thorough preparation.

Encourage your student to follow this five-day study program:

- **Four days before the test,** your teen should gather relevant class materials, including notes, outlines, quizzes and handouts. Arranging them by date will make them easier to follow.
- **Three days before the test,** your teen should read everything over and make notes on facts, formulas and definitions likely to appear on the test. Then your teen can practice recalling the information, by using flash cards or a self-quiz app such as Quizlet.
- **Two days before the test,** your teen should review the assigned readings. Using the headings as a guide, your teen can list essay questions that may show up on the test and make notes about how to answer them.
- **One day before the test,** it's time for a self-test. Your teen should try to recall and write memorized facts correctly, create an essay outline or apply math or science formulas by using them to solve sample problems.
- **The day of the test,** your teen should repeat the previous day's tasks and collect and bring allowed items (notes, calculator, etc.) to class.



## Show support at study time

Buckling down to schoolwork isn't easy for teens when the people around them are all relaxing and having fun. At least part of each evening, "study" along with your teen. Read a book or do some paperwork. Your support shows that education is a family priority.



## Make a learning connection

When struggling with a subject in school, many teens say things like, "I'm just not a [subject] person." But they are missing the vital connection between practice and results.

Make it clear that your teen *can* learn, get smarter and do well—by putting in effort and practice. Talk about skills your teen has improved this way, like free-throw shooting or guitar playing. Praise your teen's determination. Having a can-do attitude motivates students to face—and overcome—challenges.



## Offer tips for useful notes

Taking detailed and complete notes in class promotes active learning and improves students' ability to recall the material later. Share these strategies with your teen:

- **Use two columns**—take notes in one and add topic headings in the other.
- **Take notes by hand,** rather than on a keyboard. Studies show that this helps students process information better.
- **Create a list of abbreviations** for frequently-used words.
- **Review notes daily.** Your teen can jot down questions or clarify points while the memory of the class is still fresh.

Source: J. Gonzalez, "Note-taking: A Research Roundup," *Cult of Pedagogy*.



## Careful writing includes proofreading

Your teen just wrote the last sentence of a paper and is happy to be finished. But turning it in without proofreading is a mistake. And relying on technology to clean up writing is, too. It can miss—and even introduce—errors.

Proofreading helps students ensure their writing is free of careless errors. Encourage your teen to:

- **Schedule time** to proofread before an assignment is due.
- **Read each word slowly.** Our eyes tend to fill in missing letters or words. Reading aloud can help your teen catch mistakes.
- **Look for common errors.** If your teen is unsure when to use *affect* or *effect*, for example, that is something to double-check before turning the paper in.
- **Proofread at least twice.** Reading from back to front can make spelling errors stand out.
- **Avoid getting discouraged.** With practice, your teen will develop not only proofreading skills, but also a better ability to write clearly from the start.



## My teen would rather argue than talk. What can I do?

**Q:** We were close once, but now my teen gets annoyed and makes a face when I ask about school or anything else. I want to be involved, but our conversations always seem to turn into arguments. What can I do?

**A:** You are right about the value of staying tuned into your teen's life. Family engagement has a positive effect on school success and also on teens' overall well-being.



It sounds like your teen is going through a typical phase—similar to one you've likely seen before. As a toddler, your child may have shouted *no* and thrown tantrums. Now, you get attitude and arguments. With a few adjustments, the same things that worked then can work now:

- **Try not to take it personally.** Your teen is figuring out how to be an individual, separate from you. Your student still needs you, but probably won't admit it. Stay calm, and avoid responding to anger with anger.
- **Maintain limits.** House rules such as *No insults* and *No yelling* should always apply. Say that you will listen when your teen speaks respectfully.
- **Affirm that you will always be there** for your teen. But unless you suspect something is seriously wrong, let your teen figure things out independently for now. Given room, your teen may grow closer to you again.



## Are you warding off a senior slump?

In the second half of senior year, many students start to coast. They don't want to study or even attend school at all. Are you helping your teen avoid this self-sabotaging behavior? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you track** your teen's attendance so you can take action if it slips?
2. **Do you talk** with your teen about why grades still matter? Colleges can and do take back offers of admission if students' performance drops.
3. **Do you plan** activities with other senior families that will give your students a reason to stay engaged with school?
4. **Do you find** real-world ways to help your teen engage with school topics?

5. **Do you suggest** learning opportunities such as volunteering and interning?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are keeping your teen focused on learning. For each no, try that idea.

"Starting strong is good. Finishing strong is epic."  
—Robin Sharma

## Point to media examples

It's often easier to teach teens to think about the link between actions and consequences when the examples aren't personal. Look for media stories about students, celebrities and others making poor life choices. Show them to your teen. Then, ask questions like:



- What was the person doing that led to the negative consequence?
- How could this affect the person's future?
- How will others be affected by this outcome?

## Lessen the effects of stress

Stressful life events can derail students' progress and even lead to dropping out. To help keep stress from stopping your high schooler:

- **Counter negativity.** If your teen thinks things will never change, discuss how small changes can make a difference.
- **Help your teen divide** overwhelming tasks into parts and pick one to do today.
- **Suggest taking a break** for some outdoor exercise.

## Hand over responsibilities

Assuming more responsibility for themselves helps prepare teens for independent adulthood. Make it your teen's responsibility to:

- **Use a calendar** to track commitments and plan time.
- **Make appointments** for medical and dental care, hair care, etc.
- **Create a budget** for saving and spending, and stick to it.
- **Follow the news.** Learning what world and local leaders must deal with provides perspective on teens' own responsibilities.

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