

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Santa Cruz Valley Union High School

Teach your teen strategies for evaluating online information

The world of digital media is changing fast, and the vast amount of information available online is not regulated for quality or accuracy. Some of it is misleading or just plain wrong. As a result, the ability to assess the accuracy, reliability and bias of online sources is a vital skill for high school students.

Whether your teen is looking online for information for a school assignment or for personal interest, recommend using these strategies:



- **Choose among search results carefully.** That AI summary above the list of results may be drawing on unreliable sources. The sites at the top of the list aren't necessarily the best—they may have paid to be there.
- **Consider the source.** When reading anything online, your teen should ask: *Is the purpose of this site or channel to sell a product or agenda? Where do the facts come from?*
- **Compare sources.** Your teen should check out multiple sites on the same subject. Comparing two or three side by side can help your teen see the limits and merits of each.
- **Be skeptical of health information.** Many sources are in business to sell products. Your teen should discuss health information with a doctor before acting on it.

Source: J. Breakstone and others, *Students' Civic Online Reasoning: A National Portrait*, The Stanford History Education Group, Stanford University.



Apply new thinking skills to learning

Brain development in the high school years gives students' more ability to think analytically, plan ahead, solve problems and control impulses. But they need practice in applying these new skills to learning and schoolwork.

Encourage your teen to adopt study habits that help, such as:

- **Color-coding** different types of information and materials. Your teen's brain will categorize the information it sees in different colors as it processes what steps to take next.
- **Outlining steps** of long-term projects. Your teen will be able to
- see progress, what remains to be done and due dates in one place.
- **Following routines.** Consistent patterns help teens manage time and stay on track.
- **Creating diagrams** to visualize information. These make it easier to understand and recall material.

Source: P. Lorain, "Brain Development in Young Adolescents," National Education Association.

School counselors can help

You have an ally in supporting your teen in school. Your teen's counselor is trained to assist families with many issues. Reach out with questions or concerns about:



- **Classes** or scheduling.
- **Grades**, academic or learning issues and how to help your teen.
- **Social or emotional issues** affecting your teen.
- **Planning for life** after high school.
- **Finding resources** and support in a family crisis.

Improve learning behavior

In a recent survey of teachers, the majority said that disruptive student behavior in school has gotten worse. Teachers also say that effective help from families would have a positive impact. To provide it:

- **Discuss** appropriate school behavior with your teen. Make it clear you expect it.
- **Involve your teen** in setting rules and consequences. Enforce them consistently.
- **Keep an open mind** if the school contacts you with a concern about your teen's behavior. Listen to all sides before making decisions or taking action.

Source: H. Kurtz and M. Riser-Kositsky, "Teacher Morale in 2026, Five Takeaways," Education Week.

Foster more responsibility

Self-disciplined, responsible students do better in school—and adulthood. To foster these traits, ask your teen to:

- **Schedule** and track personal appointments.
- **Set** and stick to a budget.
- **Plan** a family activity.
- **Read** news articles. The responsibilities of world leaders offer teens perspective.



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HIGH SCHOOL

October 2026



Math isn't my strength. How can I help my teen with it?

Q: My teen is having a tough time with math this year. I was never very good in math, and I don't know how to help. What can I do?

A: This is a common situation. But no matter what your own math skills are, there are several ways you can support your high school student:

- **Model the right attitude.** Research shows that families' attitudes toward math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in it. Instead of saying "I never liked math, either," make it clear to your teen that you think math is worth learning and your teen is capable of learning it.
- **Point out all the ways** you use math during the day—on the job, in the kitchen, while paying bills, etc. Help your teen see that math is something adults need to know.
- **Get your teen talking.** Ask your teen to explain a problem to you, step by step.
- **Suggest tackling any part of a problem** that your teen *can* do, and showing all work. Then your teen can ask the teacher for clarification, and the teacher will be able to see where things went off track.
- **Encourage persistence.** The feeling of finally "getting it" motivates students to take on new challenges.



Are you helping your teen handle issues?

Few students sail through school without ever hitting a snag—a challenging class, a complex concept, a demanding teacher. Do you know how to help if your teen is facing an academic struggle? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you help** your teen get to the root of the issue? Ask, "Why do you think you are struggling?"
2. **Do you recommend** that your teen spend time every day studying for the class?
3. **Do you encourage** your teen to ask the teacher for help making a plan for improvement?
4. **Do you explore** other resources for help with your teen, such as online videos or tutoring?
5. **Do you contact** the teacher or school counselor yourself if your teen continues to struggle?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are boosting your teen's ability to solve academic problems. For each no, try that idea.

"Where there is a problem there is an opportunity to learn something new."
—Nitin Nandao

Get specific about reading

Teens are more likely to do things when they are given specific instructions rather than general suggestions. So to encourage reading, try suggesting a specific book. To find titles to recommend:

1. **Ask what types of writing** your teen enjoys—fantasy, nonfiction, biography, etc.
2. **Find lists** and reviews of books for teens on sites like [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) and [Commonsensemedia.org](https://www.common Sense Media.org).
3. **Make a list** of a few titles your teen might like. Suggest one to check out on your teen's next trip to the library.

Source: T. Cremin and L. Scholes, "Reading for pleasure: scrutinising the evidence base" *Language and Education*.

Teach wise decision-making

Teens' decisions can affect their futures. Go through this process with your teen:

1. **Describe** the situation in detail.
2. **Brainstorm** as many options as you can. Discuss the pros and cons of each.
3. **Let** your teen decide.
4. **Evaluate.** Would your teen make the same choice again?



Establish social precautions

Social media can help teens feel connected, but it can also provoke feelings of anxiety and depression. To limit negative effects:

- **Charge phones away** from your teen's bedroom at night.
- **Encourage mood checks.** If social media is getting your teen down, it's time to turn to a friend or trusted adult.
- **Set a cooling-off period.** Say, "If a post makes you mad, wait 24 hours before responding."

Source: T. Masri-zada and others, "The Impact of Social Media & Technology on Child and Adolescent Mental Health," *Journal of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Disorders*.

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