HIGH SCHOOL

September 2026

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Santa Cruz Valley Union High School

Help your teen lay a foundation for success in the new school year

Whether your student is new to the school or simply entering a higher grade, the start of a new school year means adjusting to change. Classes may seem more challenging. Teachers may have different expectations. Friends may be in other classes, or even in other schools.

To make it easier to take new responsibilities in stride, encourage your teen to:

- **Create a schedule.** Have your teen write all assignments, commitments and responsibilities on a calendar. Then, work together to help your student block out enough time each week to fulfill all responsibilities.
- **Adopt effective study habits.** Have your teen set regular daily study times that allow enough time for sleep at night. Encourage a weekly check of grades on quizzes and assignments. If your teen begins to struggle or fall behind, recommend talking to the teacher right away.
- **Establish digital down times.** Students are using technology when doing schoolwork more than ever. Make sure your teen's day includes tech-free times for exercise, conversations and creative thinking. Charge all devices outside your teen's room at night to avoid interfering with sleep.
- **Talk about how the school day went.** Ask questions about social and academic aspects of school. How is your teen adjusting?

Key ways to support high schoolers

Helping a high schooler succeed academically is different from working with a younger child. Like many families, you may face two emerging challenges:

1. **Your teen's development.** Teens are often less likely to talk about classes and what they are learning in school than they were when they were younger.
2. **Advanced class topics.** You may not be familiar or feel able to help your teen with the material.

To stay engaged with your teen's education throughout these years:

- **Keep expectations high.** Make it clear that you expect your teen's best effort in school. Check often on your teen's progress.
- **Stay aware of schedules** for tests and assignments. Saying "Isn't your math test tomorrow?" tells your teen you are paying attention.
- **Attend school events.** Meet and connect with other families and school staff.

Source: S. Blaney, *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* ChangeWorks Publishing.

Bolster reading fluency

The ability to read quickly, accurately and with understanding is called *fluency*. To foster fluency, ask your teen to:

- **Practice with pleasure reading.** Suggest reading light material on topics of interest as quickly as possible.
- **Read silently.** Whispering words slows reading and can hinder comprehension.
- **Read aloud with you.** Read a sentence or paragraph with expression. Then, have your student read it.
- **Read short material repeatedly,** such as poems.

Source: "Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9," U.S. Department of Education.

Model respect for teachers

Students who treat teachers respectfully improve the learning environment for everyone in class. Set an example for your teen. Contact this year's teachers and begin a working relationship. Then, when discussing teachers with your teen, refer to them by name. If your teen shares a minor complaint about a teacher, offer perspective: "Teaching is hard work. Mr. Smith may just have been tired."

Friends add to school life

School friends can help motivate students to do well and offer support when times are tough. To promote positive friendships:

- **Discuss qualities** that make a good friend. Do your teen's friends display them? Does your teen?
- **Explain that it's quality,** not quantity, that matters. Over time, teens who have a few close friends are less likely to be depressed than kids who seek popularity.

Source: R.K. Narr and others, "Close Friendship Strength and Broader Peer Group Desirability as Differential Predictors of Adult Mental Heath," *Child Development.*

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Q&A How can I help my teen start thinking about the future?

Q: My teen is in 11th grade—the time to focus on planning for life after high school. But my student has no idea what that might look like. How can I help my teen find a path forward?

A: Many high school students are uncertain about their next steps in life—and that's OK. But it's not OK to avoid thinking about the possibilities.

To start your teen thinking, ask:

- **What school subjects interest you most?** Is there an area your teen feels is a strength? A type of assignment your teen enjoys doing?
- **What are your favorite things** to do in your free time? Does your teen like to read? Create or build things? Spend time outdoors?
- **Would you rather do activities** with friends or alone? Be part of a large groups or small ones? Lead or be part of a team?
- **How could you explore your options?** Could your teen interview or shadow someone in a career of interest? Are there career and technical training classes at school your teen could take?

Encourage your teen to ask a school counselor about available resources. There may be assessments that can help your teen make choices. The counselor can also help your teen find out what kind of further education will be needed to achieve career goals.

Parent Quiz Are you talking about tough situations?

Many situations high school students face involve dilemmas, like choosing between the fun or easy thing to do and the right thing. Are you preparing your teen to handle sticky situations? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you have** casual chats with your teen on a wide variety of topics? These can lead into more serious talks.
2. **Do you discuss** the values that are important to your family?
3. **Do you encourage** your teen to be honest with you, and then listen attentively and calmly?
4. **Do you bring up** difficult situations your teen might face before they occur?
5. **Do you role-play** situations together so your teen can rehearse ways to say *no* to things that feel wrong?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your teen learn handle tough situations in positive ways. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it."

—Norman Schwartzkopf

Review and reinforce rules

Students who don't know the school rules and policies can still face consequences for breaking them. Together, review the rules and consequences regarding:

- **Absences.** How should you report them? What makes them excused?
- **Technology.** Is phone use allowed? When? What are appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI?
- **Grading and schoolwork.** These may vary from class to class, so ask your teen to pay attention to teacher explanations and discuss them with you.
- **Security.** If you are unfamiliar with policies or procedures, ask the office.

Promote habits for learning

Nutritious food and regular physical activity help students stay alert and learn during the school day. Help your teen make time every day for:

- **Breakfast—**even if it is a piece of cheese or a banana on the way out the door.
- **Exercise.** Even a short walk after school can reduce stress and help your teen be ready to study and tackle assignments.

Say *no* to skipping classes

Students with consistent, strong attendance have better long-term outcomes and avoid issues that kids who skip class face. To make it clear to your teen that skipping is not OK:

- **Say that you expect** your teen to attend every class.
- **Maintain routines** at home that help your teen get to school rested and on time.
- **Remind your teen** that regular attendance helps students maintain positive relationships with peers and teachers.

Source: "Pay Attention to Attendance," AttendanceWorks.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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