

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Loudoun County Public Schools  
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*still make the difference!*



## Three New Year's resolutions will lead to success in school

It's the start of a new year, and that's a good time to take stock. Are your teen's grades where she—and you—would like them to be? If not, it may be time to make some learning resolutions. Here are a few:

- 1. Get to class, on time, every day.** Teachers can't teach students who aren't in class. And if teens consistently miss a class, or if they arrive late, they're going to miss something important.
- 2. Read.** A study by the National Endowment for the Arts found that on average teens spent exactly seven minutes a day reading outside of school. Not surprisingly, reading scores also fell. So encourage your teen to spend time

reading something she likes—a story about sports, a thriller or a magazine. It doesn't matter what she reads, just that she reads.

- 3. Cut down on screen time.** A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that most teens spend seven or more hours a day on media use. Not surprisingly, those with the highest media usage had the lowest grades. So get your teen to turn off the TV and put the phone on a shelf for an hour or two. Instead, use that time to read, be active or just daydream.

**Source:** Kaiser Family Foundation, "Generation M<sup>2</sup>: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-year-olds," [www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf](http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf).

## Your teen's motivation starts with you



Whether he acts like it or not, your high schooler wants to know that you love him and that you think he is important. Knowing this will motivate your teen to succeed in school and in life.

To show that you care:

- **Talk to him.** Simply asking your teen about his day tells him that he matters to you. Ask what the most interesting thing he learned was, or who he sat with at lunch, or even just what he thinks about the TV show you're both watching.
- **Spend time with him.** Try to carve out a little bit of one-on-one time with your teen—just you and him. Avoid distractions. Don't allow phone calls, email or text messages to interrupt your time together. Consider turning something you already do into "together time"—like exercising or cooking dinner.
- **Say "I love you" or "I'm proud of you."** Just try not to embarrass him in front of his friends!

## Ask your high schooler questions to build critical thinking skills



To survive today's world, teens need to have and use critical thinking skills. Teens need to make important decisions about drinking,

driving and their relationships with other teens. They need to consider the effects of what they do.

The only way for teens to gain those important critical thinking skills is to practice thinking critically. You encourage your teen to think critically when you:

- **Ask questions.** Talk about hypothetical situations or things you see on television. What would your teen do in that situation? Why? What other plans of action can he think of? Discuss the pros and cons of each. This helps your teen learn to think critically about his actions and the consequences of those actions.
- **Ask for advice.** Planning to plant a garden this spring? Ask your teen what plants he thinks you should

choose. Having a problem with a coworker at work? Tell your teen about it, and ask him what he would do in your shoes. And keep in mind that you're still the parent—you don't have to do what your teen suggests. Asking his advice just gets his mind working, and encourages him to contribute to your life.

- **Ask about his political ideas and spiritual beliefs.** This can be a sensitive topic in some families. If you choose to discuss these issues, remember that your teen is trying to form his own ideas. Avoid attacking his thoughts or telling him why you think he's wrong. Question calmly why he chooses to hold those beliefs.

**"In the time it takes you to understand a 14-year-old, he turns 15."**

—Robert Brault

## Help your teen make a world of difference right at home



Many teens seem to think that they have to be famous in order to make a difference in today's world. However, the

small actions teens take every day can change the world—by affecting one person at a time.

To help your teen make a difference, encourage her to:

- **Volunteer.** Giving back to the community will help your teen feel like she's making a difference. Your teen can check with her guidance counselor for opportunities in the community.

- **Be kind.** If your teen treats others politely, she will feel better about herself. Something as simple as a smile could brighten someone else's day.
- **Become politically active.** Even if your teen isn't old enough to vote, she can stay informed on issues that affect teens. She can even write letters to government officials about ideas she has to improve the community.

**Source:** R. Lister, "Teens Making a Difference: Simple Things Teens Can Do to Change the World," suite101.com, [http://youth-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/teens\\_making\\_a\\_difference](http://youth-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/teens_making_a_difference).

## Is your teenager using social networks safely?



Social networking sites—like MySpace and Facebook—are increasingly popular among teens. Answer *yes* or *no*

to each question below to find out if you are helping your teen be safe on these sites:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about the dangers of sharing personal information online?
- \_\_\_ **2. Does your teen know** that if she chooses to be on a social networking site, she must allow you to be part of her network?
- \_\_\_ **3. Have you talked** about not posting inappropriate photographs or comments about drugs and alcohol online?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you have limits** to when, where and for how long your teen can be on social networking sites?
- \_\_\_ **5. Does your teen know** you will monitor the computer and her cell phone to see what she's doing?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your teen use social networking safely. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Three strategies will help your teen avoid school problems



In elementary and middle school, it was easier for teachers to stay in touch. When they saw the same students all day, every day, they were more likely to notice problems and contact parents to resolve the issues.

High school teachers are dealing with many more students each day. It's not that high school teachers don't care. They care a great deal! But with the increased number of students, it's often more difficult for them to get in touch with parents until a problem has become serious.

So be proactive. Make an effort to contact your teen's teachers. You can call to make an appointment, send an email or write a note.

Remember that teachers often hear from parents if their children are having problems, but hear little if things are going well. Consider emailing or writing a note of thanks to a teacher from whom your teen learned a lot last semester.

And of course, you're helping your high schooler avoid school problems when you:

1. **Stress the importance** of regular attendance and coming to school on time.
2. **Attend school events** in which your teen plays a role.
3. **Support your teen's learning** at home.

**Source:** "The Parent Involvement Report Card," Project Appleseed.org, [www.projectappleseed.org/reportcard.html](http://www.projectappleseed.org/reportcard.html).

# Review your teenager's schedule to make sure it's reasonable



Colleges and employers look for "well-rounded" students. So it's important that your high schooler be involved in some extracurricular activities. But if he's running from club meetings to basketball practice to a debate tournament, without any time for dinner (let alone homework!), your teen may have too many commitments.

To determine if your teen may be overscheduled:

- **Look for signs of stress.** Is your teen more irritable or tired than usual? Has he lost his appetite? Does he seem to have trouble concentrating?
- **Review his habits.** Does he constantly stay up late to finish homework? Does he often forget where he's supposed to be?

- **Discuss his schedule.** Does he feel like he has too much going on? Does he have any "free time" during the week to relax?

If you and your teen agree that he's overscheduled, it's time to take action:

- **Help your teen set priorities.** Ask him to rank his activities in order of "most important" to "least important." Remember that "homework" should be at the top of that list!
- **Have a discussion** about which of the "least important" activities he'd be willing to take a break from or drop completely.
- **Remind your teen** that his health—and school—come first.

**Source:** "12 Warning Signs That Your Child May Be Overscheduled," Scholastic Families, [www.scholastic.com/schoolage/grade4/development/qc\\_overscheduled.htm](http://www.scholastic.com/schoolage/grade4/development/qc_overscheduled.htm).

**Q:** My daughter is a junior. Both she and her friends now have driver's licenses. Mostly, that means we don't see her. *Ever.* Even on school nights, she heads out to "study" with friends. I'm a little worried—but I'm also lonely. I miss her.

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Spending time with friends can be a good thing for teens. It is one of the ways they learn about themselves as they move into adulthood.

But as always, there can be too much of a good thing. If your daughter is really spending every night out of your house, it's time to set some limits:

- **Find out the specifics.** Where is she going? Who else is there? Is there adult supervision?
- **Limit the number of nights** she can be out of the house each week. The point is not that you want to keep her away from her friends, but that you want to make sure she spends time with the family as well.
- **Set an earlier curfew** on school nights.
- **Host study groups.** If she is working on a project with other students, offer to let them meet at your house.
- **Find ways to stay connected.** It's normal to feel lonely now that your teen is spending so much time out of the house. Perhaps the two of you could schedule time to do something you both like. Watch a favorite movie while drinking hot chocolate. Do each other's nails. Just find time to stay connected.

—Kris Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Discipline

## Pick your battles; set rules that are clear, consistent



Teens do a lot of things that drive their parents crazy. And sometimes, parents get so upset that they completely

lose their temper.

But not all problems are created equal. If you possibly can, it's best to pick your battles. Let slide the minor and irritating behaviors that are a part of growing up—clothes, hair and music.

Instead, save your efforts for the things that *really* matter. There are some issues on which, as a parent, you must set clear and consistent rules. These include:

- **Your teen's safety.** Riding in a car when the driver has been drinking? That's simply reckless, and your teen should know there would be very serious consequences for doing it.
- **Alcohol and drug use.** They are dangerous and they're illegal. It's also important to send a clear message about misusing prescription drugs. Today, this is one of the fastest-growing forms of drug abuse among teens. Breaking any rule about alcohol or drugs should result in severe consequences.
- **Mistreating others.** Teens have a tendency to be self-absorbed. But being mean to a younger brother or sister, yelling at a parent or bullying someone at school is unacceptable behavior.

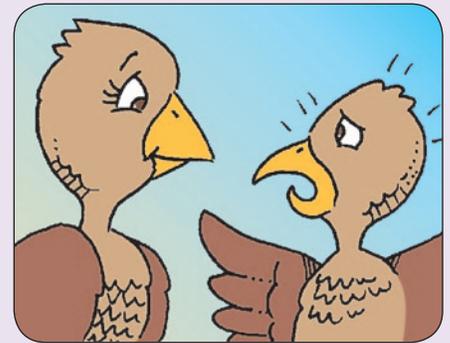
**Source:** Thomas W. Phelan, *Surviving Your Adolescents: How to Manage and Let Go Of Your 13-18 Year Olds*, ISBN: 1-889-14008-2, Child Management, Inc.

## How should you respond when your teenager starts whining?

**T**eenagers whine. They whine when they don't get their way. They whine when Mom or Dad enforces a rule. They whine because they think if they keep you talking long enough, you'll give in.

Of course, if you ever do give in, you're just opening yourself up to even more whining in the future. Instead, you should think about how to show your teen a more appropriate way to react when something is bugging him. Here are some better ways to respond:

- **Change the subject.** Instead of engaging, ask (innocently), "Pasta or pizza tonight?"
- **Use humor.** When your teen says, "You never let me go out," take a moment to think. Then



say, "No, I'm sure I let you go out a month ago last Tuesday."

- **Agree.** "You're right. Life sure isn't fair all the time."
- **Talk** about how whining makes you feel. "I feel really bad when you say things like that."

**Source:** William H. Hughes, *Raise Winning Kids Without a Fight*, ISBN: 9780-8018-9340-7, Johns Hopkins University Press.

## What you *don't* give your teen shapes attitudes about money



She asked you to buy her a pair of expensive shoes she saw a friend wearing. She wants to purchase the latest jeans which she says cost \$200.

Even if you could afford these things, should you? As a parent, you need to remember that what you *don't* give your teen can be more important than what you do.

Teens have always wanted to look like their friends. There's nothing wrong with looking fashionable. But there's a big difference between looking nice and wearing clothes that cost more than the rent on your first apartment.

What you do—and don't—give your teen will shape her attitudes about money in her adult life. If she gets used to wearing high-fashion clothing, what will she do when she gets her first job? She'll never be able to buy those expensive shoes *and* pay her rent.

So make a conscious effort *not* to give your teen everything she wants. Give her a clothing allowance and let her make choices. But once the money is gone, it's gone. You'll help her learn the financial self-discipline that will make her a more responsible adult.

**Source:** Kevin Leman, *Adolescence Isn't Terminal: It Just Feels Like It!* ISBN: 0-842-35288-0, Tyndale House Publishers.