

High School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Teens are more motivated to write if their writing is shared

It seems like teens barely communicate in complete words today, let alone full sentences. But that doesn't mean writing is becoming any less important in the workplace. In fact, the ability to write well could be the difference between your teen getting a good job or getting passed over.

But how can you encourage your teen to write? One survey found that teens are more motivated to write when they know their writing will be shared in print or on the Internet.

Suggest that your teen look into:

- **Writing contests.** Encourage your teen to search online or ask her English teacher or the librarian about entering her work in writing contests. From poetry to fiction to essays, there's a contest out there that's sure to fit your teen. Many

offer prizes or scholarship opportunities. Just beware of scams—young writers should avoid any contest that asks for an "entrance fee."

- **The school newspaper** or a literary magazine. By joining one of these activities, your teen is improving her writing and adding another extracurricular activity to her résumé.
- **Online literary magazines.** With your teen, check out a website like www.teenink.com. Teen Ink accepts submissions from students between the ages of 13 and 19.

Source: A. Lenhart and others, "What Teens Tell Us Encourages Them to Write," Pew Internet & American Life Project, www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Writing-Technology-and-Teens/10-What-Teens-Tell-Us-Encourages-Them-to-Write.aspx.

Tell your teen to tackle the 'worst' first



Learning to do the things you don't like to do is a tough lesson. But in adult life, there are always things you'd rather avoid. After all, who likes doing dishes or laundry? Who likes paying bills? But just try putting those off and see what happens!

Here are some ways you can help your teen learn to do the things he really wants to avoid:

- **Do the worst first.** Your child may never *love* doing his math homework. But if he knows that once it's done he can read the novel he loves, it will be more appealing.
- **Make it a challenge.** Some teens are competitive—so put that to work. "Can you get all your math problems solved correctly in the next 20 minutes? Yesterday it took you 22 minutes."
- **Make a realistic estimate.** How long will that math take, realistically? Twenty minutes? He's already wasted three hours putting it off.

Source: Rita Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child*, ISBN: 0-802-77636-1, Walker & Company.

Resolve to spend 15 minutes each day reading for pleasure



The National Assessment of Educational Progress found that between 1984 and 2004, the number of

17-year-olds reporting they never or hardly ever read for fun rose from 9% to 19%, while the percentage who read daily dropped from 31% to 22%.

That's a disturbing trend. Yes, teens are busy. But every teen needs strong vocabulary and reading comprehension skills—and the best way to improve those is through practice. When a teen is enjoying a “fun book,” he is improving his grammar and fluency without even realizing it.

Stop your teen from becoming one of those who “never or hardly ever” reads for fun. Make a pact with him that you will both spend just 15 minutes each day reading for pleasure. (Your teen is more likely to read if he sees you doing it, too.) Fifteen minutes is easy—he could wake up 15 minutes earlier and read

to start his day, or spend 15 minutes reading before falling asleep at night. He could read during lunch, or right after school or on the bus.

Those 15 minutes will add up quickly. Fifteen minutes a day is almost two hours each week—or over 90 hours a year! That's 90 hours of practicing skills that your child will need for the rest of his life. Are you willing to take the 15-minute challenge?

Source: G. Wiehardt, “Realistic Ideas to Get Teens Reading,” Scholastic Teachers, www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3747845.

“Resolve to edge in a little reading every day, if it is but a single sentence. If you gain 15 minutes a day, it will make itself felt at the end of the year.”

—Horace Mann

Know the facts before having a discussion about peer pressure



In order to prepare your teen to combat peer pressure, you have to know what she is being pressured to do. A survey by

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that teens are often being pressured on the topics of:

- **Smoking.** Nearly 25% of high school students smoke cigarettes.
- **Drinking.** A whopping two-thirds of teens between 14 and 17 have tried alcohol.
- **Drugs.** A little more than 25% of 14- to 17-year-olds reported that they have used illegal drugs.

- **Sex.** Just about one in every three teens aged 14 to 15 has had sexual intercourse.

Think about your family values regarding these issues. Then, rather than banning your teen from leaving the house, have a conversation with your teen about why you feel the way you feel. Knowing *why* you don't want her smoking, drinking or involved in other risky behaviors may be just enough to encourage your teen to say *no* to her friends.

Source: E. Heubeck, “Teen Peer Pressure: Raising a Peer Pressure-Proof Child,” WebMD, www.webmd.com/parenting/teen-abuse-cough-medicine-9/peer-pressure.

Are you ready to deal with spring fever?



For many teens, spring seems to signal that it's okay to stop doing school work. Spring is when attention wanders, atten-

dance slips and grades drop. Are you doing everything you can to prepare for spring fever? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **I will talk with my teen** about attendance and make sure he is in school every day.

___2. **I will pay close attention** to how my teen is doing in his classes. I will reinforce rules like having a regular study time every day.

___3. **I have made sure** the school has my most current contact information.

___4. **I will talk with my teen** about the importance of finishing what you start. Last quarter grades are just as important as first quarter grades.

___5. **I'll pick my battles.** If he's going to school and doing his homework, I won't get too upset about the fact that he needs a haircut!

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are taking precautions to combat spring fever. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Show your high schooler that you discipline because you care



Effective discipline isn't just about telling your teen what *not* to do. It's also praising your teen for what he's doing correctly.

But teens can be tricky when it comes to affection. The things that may have worked when they were younger—like giving hugs or baking cookies—might now seem childish. So how can you show your teen you care—without making him say “Oh, Mom”? Here are a few ideas:

- **Smile when you see your teen.**
- **Tell your teen** that you expect him to do his best—but you don't expect him to be perfect.

- **Spend time with your teen.** Listen to his favorite music with him. Cook his favorite food with him.
- **Be there for your teen.** Keep your promises. Don't make fun of your teen. And give him a shoulder to lean on if he's had a bad day.
- **Allow your teen** to make his own choices. Support the choices he makes—or help him learn from unwise choices. Notice when your teen does something brave.
- **Ask your teen about his day.** Even if you're tired, make an effort to look interested. Let your teen know you care and you want to listen to what he has to say.

Discuss the five different styles of decision-making with your teen



You know that your teen's decision-making skills will get better as she gets older and gains more experience. But

did you know that she may actually make decisions in a different manner than you do?

With your teen, discuss the five different styles of decision-making. Which style do each of you think you are? Are you:

1. **Decisive?** People in this category often act quickly, sometimes making decisions based on limited information. But they always stick to their original decision.
2. **Flexible?** Similar to decisive decision makers, these people act on limited information. However, they are open to changing their minds. If their first solution to a problem doesn't work, they will switch to another one. And they will re-evaluate their decisions as more information becomes available.

3. **Hierarchical?** These types of decision-makers collect as much information as they can before making a decision. They look at all the information and determine the best solution. And they stick with their decision—because they have worked out all the details before they made it.
4. **Integrative?** These people are like scientists. They collect and evaluate a lot of information, but realize there are many solutions that could work for the problem. They test each idea, imagining the outcome in their minds.
5. **Systemic?** These people collect as much information as possible and come up with as many solutions as possible. They then rank the solutions from *best* to *worst* and try out each one down the list until the problem is solved.

Source: L. Morton, “5 Decision Making Styles for Small Business,” Strategic Market Segmentation, www.strategicmarketsegmentation.com/5-decision-making-styles.

Q: My daughter had her heart set on going to a particular college. But she has just learned that she was not accepted. Unfortunately, one of her friends did get in. She has some other colleges to choose from, but she's too sad to focus. How can I help her?

Questions & Answers

A: The time when the college envelopes arrive is one of the most stressful for high school seniors. Kids who have worked hard and studied still don't get into their top choice school.

She clearly doesn't want to look at the facts right now, but they may help her later. She should know that more students are applying to more colleges than ever before. That means that it's getting tougher for students to get into their first choice.

As for her friend—well, who knows? Perhaps she's a great violinist and the orchestra needs musicians. Perhaps she's a great goalie and the soccer team is looking for players. Schools do admit students for reasons other than their grades.

Meanwhile, concentrate on the schools where she was admitted. Encourage her to visit them again. Most schools have weekends for admitted students. Help her go with an open mind.

The truth is that there is no perfect school for any student. So help her choose a school that feels like a good fit. If in a year she is still pining for her first-choice school, she can apply to be a transfer student. But by then, she will probably be very happy at the school she chose.

—Kris Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Building Character

Volunteering can give your teen job experience



She's tried to get a job. But she's never had a job. "How can I get work experience if no one will hire me?" she asks.

The answer is volunteering. She'll help others. And she'll develop a set of skills that will show a potential employer that she can do the job. A teen who is responsible about meeting commitments when she's not getting paid is even more likely to meet them when there's a paycheck involved.

Here are some volunteer opportunities your teen might consider:

- **Volunteering in a hospital.** If your teen is considering a medical career, she should check out your local hospital. In many hospitals, she will be able to work directly with patients.
- **Creating a website.** Many small volunteer organizations don't have websites. If your teen has computer skills, perhaps she could create a home page for a local organization. She'll then have a real-world example to show a potential employer.
- **Helping your local library.** In many places, library budgets have been cut back. Your teen might be able to plan a story hour for young children. She could create a book group for elementary school students and their parents. If she is considering a career in education, this would be a great start.

Source: "20 Ways for Teenagers to Help Other People by Volunteering," www.bygpub.com/books/tg2rw/volunteer.htm.

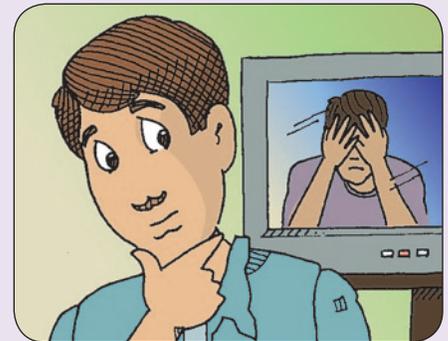
Use the media to teach your teenager about consequences

Most teens simply aren't very good at planning ahead. It's not until they get to the party that they realize there will be alcohol there. So it's important to find ways to help teens think ahead.

You can use the media—TV, newspapers, magazines—to teach your child to think about consequences. And you can do it in a way that also helps him develop self-respect.

Look for stories that highlight poor life choices. (You won't have to look far.) When athletes or TV stars get in trouble, raise the topic with your teen.

It's likely that one of you will say, "You could see that coming." That's a perfect opening. What was this person doing that led to this bad consequence? What might have happened if the person had made



different choices? How will this choice affect the person's life in the future?

Talking about other people's bad decisions offers a little distance—and some perspective. It's a great way for your teen to think about what he might do before a similar situation arises.

Source: William Sears, *The Successful Child: What Parents Can Do to Help Kids Turn Out Well*, ISBN: 9780-3167-7811-4 Hachette Book Group, a division of Little, Brown and Company.

Survey shows that teens feel good about their character



A new survey of teens says that they feel pretty good about their character. Yet 64 percent say they have cheated on a test, and one in three boys (one in four girls) admits to stealing something from a store! Clearly, there's a big disconnect here.

It's tougher than ever to raise a teen with strong character. Here's how you can help your teen:

- **Stay involved.** Teens need to develop their independence. But they still need your help. So

volunteer to chaperone a dance or go on the band trip. Just being there really helps.

- **Set limits.** Sometimes, the most character-building thing you can say is, "No."
- **Be a good role model.** When you return the extra dollar the cashier gave you, you have taught a big lesson about honesty. Your example is still the strongest teacher for your teen.

Source: "The Ethics of American Youth," Josephson Institute, <http://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard/2008/index.html>.