

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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## A disorganized locker can affect your teen's grades

School has been in session just long enough for your teen to accumulate a nice collection of “stuff” in his locker. This might not seem like such a big deal—after all, stuff that’s in your teen’s locker is stuff that isn’t on the floor of his bedroom!

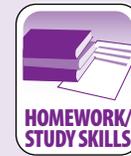
However, a disorganized locker can greatly impact your teen’s homework and study skills. If your teen can’t find his textbook, notebook or binder, he can’t complete his homework. If he can’t find his paper or problem sheet, he can’t turn it in for a grade.

If your teen has a lot of cleaning to do before he can call his locker “organized,” recommend that he stay after school and:

1. Take everything out of his locker.
2. Divide his belongings into three piles: *keep*, *take home* and *toss*.
3. Throw the *toss* items into a trash can.
4. Pack up the *take home* items to bring home.
5. Put the *keep* items back into the locker. But don’t just throw them in there. Stack books on a shelf, hang up gym clothes, put dirty items like soccer cleats on the bottom, etc.

Encourage your teen to stay organized by suggesting he do a “weekly checkup” and bring home any extra stuff every Friday. The organizational skills you help your teen develop now will help him be successful throughout his life.

## Research shows multitasking does not work



Your teen is “doing her homework.” She’s also watching TV and texting her friends. Should you tell her to stop multitasking?

Brain researcher Daniel Willingham has studied what happens to students when they are trying to concentrate. Can they remember what they read if they are also watching TV? Can they learn vocabulary words if they’re also texting their friends?

“There is always a cost to multitasking,” Willingham says. That’s because we really don’t do two things at once. Instead, we switch back and forth between them. So when students do their homework while the TV is on in the background, their homework will be of lower quality.

What about listening to music? Some people can listen to music and concentrate. Others can’t.

Still, Willingham says, the research is clear. “If you want to do something well, it’s best to focus on one task at a time.”

**Source:** D. Willingham, “Data Shows Kids Shouldn’t Multitask,” *The Washington Post*, <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/guest-bloggers/data-shows-kids-shouldnt-multi.html>.

## Avoid yelling to keep the lines of communication open with teens



If there's one way to guarantee your teen won't listen to you, it's to yell at her. When a parent yells at a teen, the conversation basically stops. The teen is no longer listening, and the parent is venting his frustration more than he is trying to make a point.

That said, teens occasionally do things that cause parents to yell. Whether it's missing curfew or getting a lower-than-expected grade, your reaction may be to raise your voice. The key to keeping the lines of communication open—and keeping your teen listening—is to not raise your voice. Here's how:

- **Respond, don't react.** Reacting—acting on your first impulse without thinking about it—often leads to yelling. It's like when you stub your toe—your reaction may be to curse loudly. But if your teen is watching, you may

silently count to 10 instead. Try to respond calmly in a similar way.

- **Realize whose problem it is.** If you lose your temper over a bad grade, your teen becomes more concerned with hiding from your wrath than with determining how to raise that grade. Remain calm and ask your teen how she plans to deal with her problem.
- **Take a break.** If there is no way you can face your teen without screaming, leave the room. Come back when you feel less angry.

**Source:** D. Witmer, "Stop Yelling at Your Teen, Here's How," About.com, <http://parentingteens.about.com/od/talktoyourteen/qt/yellingatteens.htm>.

**"Too many of today's children have straight teeth and crooked morals."**

—Unknown high school principal

## Spur your high schooler into action by using fewer words



Your son forgot to take out the trash—again. So you reminded him—again. "David, I already told you three times that taking out the trash on Monday nights is your responsibility. And today is Monday, so I expect that trash to be on the curb before you go to bed tonight. Do I make myself clear?"

Sounds like a reasonable thing to say, right? Of course—if you were speaking to another adult. Teenagers may look like (and claim to be)

adults, but their brains aren't fully developed. Teens' attention spans are very short—which means you may have lost your teen by "three times," even if he nodded, like he was supposed to, when you finished speaking.

You can save your breath—and actually get results—by using fewer words. Trim your speech down to just the bare minimum. Say, "David. Trash. Now." Even the most scattered teen would have trouble missing the point of that statement!

## Can you survive your teenager's first romance?



Many teens start dating in high school. Are you helping your teen navigate her way safely through her first romance? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about what to look for in a significant other, focusing on the importance of qualities like kindness and respect?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you talked** about your family's values? If your teen feels pressured to do something, let her know she can always talk with you.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you know** where your teen is going, who she'll be with, and when she'll be home *before* she goes on a date?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you insist** on meeting the person *before* your teen goes on the first date?
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you told** your teen that dating is a privilege? Responsibilities, such as schoolwork, must come first.

### How well are you doing?

You can't prevent broken hearts, but each *yes* means you're helping your teen navigate today's dating game. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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## Quality time makes a difference in relationships with teenagers



A recent survey found that overall, 78 percent of teens rely on their parents for advice. In a time when teens seem to be facing more peer pressure than ever, that's great news!

However, your teen can't ask your advice if you're never around. It's important to carve out some quality time to spend with your teen. Even an hour per week can make a big difference in your relationship with your teen—and yes, talking during family dinner counts as quality time!

Here are some other ideas:

- **Set up a standing coffee date**—either at the local shop or at your kitchen table. You don't have to serve your teen coffee. Just enjoy some relaxing one-on-one time together to sit and talk.

- **Schedule a monthly "Teen's Choice" day.** Let your teen choose her favorite meal and activity for the day. Maybe she'll want to make pizza and then window-shop at the mall. Or perhaps burgers on the grill and camping out in the backyard is more her style.
- **Start a project together.** Cook your way through all the recipes in a cookbook together. Repaint the living room—or redecorate your teen's room together. Volunteer at a local charity together. Being asked to help makes teens feel like you trust them—and being active while you're talking may lead to more open conversation.

**Source:** G. Morrison, "Time Together: Spending Quality Time With Your Teen," iParenting, [www.teenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/qualitytime.htm](http://www.teenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/qualitytime.htm).

## Encourage test success even if you don't know the subject



As your teen gets older and begins to study more advanced subjects, it becomes difficult to know how to help him study for tests. You used to be able to quiz him from the book, asking questions like "What year did the American Civil War start?" But now, if you ask, "What is the Krebs cycle?" you may not be able to tell if your teen is answering correctly.

But don't let that stop you from getting involved! There are other ways you can support your teen's studying that don't involve in-depth knowledge of the topic. You can:

- **Alleviate test stress.** Help your teen see that tests are just part of life—like cleaning his room or

going to the dentist. He should try to do his best on tests. However, your teen should also realize that a test reflects what happened on one day in his life. Doing poorly on a test doesn't mean he is a failure.

- **Make sure your teen gets enough sleep** the night before a test and eats a good breakfast that morning. Recommend that he dress in layers so he's not uncomfortable by being too hot or too cold.
- **Offer some test-taking tips.** Tell your teen to read the directions carefully, answer the questions he's sure of first, circle key words in long questions to find the main point and use his time wisely.

**Q:** My son should be going to bed. Instead, he is frantically working on a history paper that is due tomorrow. This isn't the first time he's waited until the last minute. He says he works better under pressure, but I think his grades would improve if he didn't put things off. How can I help him overcome his habit of procrastination?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** It's likely that *everyone* has put off an unpleasant task at one time or another. But when it gets to be a habit, as it has with your son, it can be a real problem. In high school, teachers hand out long-term assignments.

Here are ways you can help him break the habit:

- **Get a large calendar** and post it somewhere you can both see it. Have him write down every assignment on that calendar. Then sit down together and have a planning meeting. Ask him to set priorities. What is most important?
- **Help your teen break down** long-term projects into smaller pieces. Together, think about small goals he can achieve. This is a case where small successes really will lead to larger ones.
- **Make sure he spends his** homework time on homework. He'll get more work done if he knows he can chat with his friends after he finishes.
- **Pay attention** as the school year continues. Once he starts to create better habits, work with him to keep them up so that he doesn't go back to his procrastinating ways.

—Kristin Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Responsibility

## Consequences teach lessons in responsibility



At this stage in your teen's life, you should not be the only one taking care of him. He should be taking care of himself, with guidance from you. (The exception to this is if your teen has a disability that requires extra care. But even then, he should do as much as he can.)

Here's how to help your teen manage his own life:

- **Turn as many responsibilities** as possible over to him. This includes keeping track of his schoolwork, his schedule, his transportation needs and his own possessions.
- **Don't panic** if he lets something slide and then gets himself into a bind. Example: He watched TV last night instead of doing homework. Now it's morning and he is worried because the homework is not done. Step in only if there is an emergency that could result in harm to him or another person.
- **Let him feel the consequences** of letting something slide. Example: if he doesn't do his homework, he gets a zero. Say, "Wow, that's too bad," or something similar, but nothing more than that.
- **Do not rush in to take over** the responsibility from your teen. This tells him you think he can't learn from his mistakes. Show him that you believe he really can do it on his own by letting him try again.

**Source:** Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting Teens With Love & Logic*, ISBN: 1-5768-3930-3, NavPress Publishing.

## How to keep from turning into the 'Bank of Mom and Dad'

**T**eens spend more than \$160 billion each year. Much of it comes from their parents.

But becoming a human ATM is not good for your family's budget. It's also not good for your teenager. After all, you don't plan to continue to give her an allowance when she has a job and kids of her own!

So here are some ways you can help your teen become more responsible about money:

- **Talk about** what money can—and can't—do. In today's culture, it's too easy to think that happiness is something you buy online or at a mall. Help your teen put money in its proper perspective.
- **Discuss trade-offs.** Yes, she can buy the expensive jeans. But she'll have to pack her lunch instead of buying it for the next



two months. Is it worth it? She can decide.

- **Be sure she saves.** If your teen has a part-time job, encourage her to save at least half of her paycheck.

**Source:** S. Mahoney, "Is Your Teen Money Smart?" Family Circle Magazine, [www.familycircle.com/teen/parenting/discipline/is-your-teen-money-smart/?page=1](http://www.familycircle.com/teen/parenting/discipline/is-your-teen-money-smart/?page=1).

## Help your teen be responsible when using social networks



Teens often post pictures and write things on Facebook and other social network sites that they assume are "private." Unfortunately, very little on the Internet ever is. So here are some tips to help your teen as he uses social media:

- **Stress that nothing** on the Internet is ever private. And nothing ever really is "deleted." So your teen needs to think responsibly about what he

posts on any social networking site.

- **People check these sites.** Employers check social sites before hiring. Colleges check sites before admitting students. And principals check to see that students aren't breaking the law.
- **Be friends.** Insist that your teen add you to his list of friends so you can see what he's posting.

**Source:** D. Landis, "Facebook Use Can Have Consequences for Teens," State Journal-Register, [www.sj-r.com/news/x1035105859/Posting-on-Facebook-can-have-consequences-for-teens](http://www.sj-r.com/news/x1035105859/Posting-on-Facebook-can-have-consequences-for-teens).