

# High School Parents<sup>®</sup>

April 2010  
Vol. 17, No. 8

Chambersburg Area School District

*still make the difference!*



## Show your teen that learning is about more than grades

**Y**ou probably ask your teen how he's doing in school. You may ask how biology is going. Or if math is getting any easier. If you're lucky, he'll tell you a funny story about something that happened in art class. But be honest—that's not what you're really asking about. You want to know about your teen's grades.

That is an important concern, but remember that the learning process is just as important. Make sure you show interest in what your teen is learning at school—not just what his report card says. Ask your teen:

- **What book he is reading.** What questions does he have about the story? Does he relate to the main character? Does the book remind him of any others he has read?
- **About his most recent test.** Does he think the test was a good way

to measure how well he knew the material?

- **About his accomplishments.** How did he handle the most difficult science problem he recently aced? How did he feel after finishing that research paper?
- **If he has had any experiences** in class that changed his way of thinking. You may be able to share some of your own experiences that had a similar effect on you.

Questions like these show your teen that you are interested in what he is thinking. They also show you are monitoring his development. Both of these reinforce the message that learning is about far more than just grades.

**Source:** Michael Riera, Ph.D., *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*, ISBN: 0-89087-749-1 (Celestial Arts, <http://tenspeed.crownpublishing.com>).

## Chore options can motivate your teenager



If you left it up to your teen, the grass in your backyard would be eight feet high. She would be completely out of clean clothes. And you'd have dust elephants, not dust bunnies, in the corners of your house.

For whatever reason, chores just aren't high on a teen's list of priorities. Consider asking your teen to spend a half hour per day doing whatever chores she chooses. Perhaps she'll mow the lawn on Thursday and tackle that laundry on Monday. She may vacuum her room on Tuesday and clean the bathroom on Wednesday.

By letting your teen decide what chores she completes, she gets a taste of adulthood. If she needs more encouragement, make it a house rule that she can't watch TV, play video games or chat online until a half hour of chores have been completed—but avoid nagging her if she occasionally opts to stare at the ceiling instead of completing chores.

**Source:** "Family Dynamics: Is it Possible to Motivate Your Teen?" iVillage, <http://parenting.ivillage.com/teen/tfamodynamics/0,,6r8x,00.html>.

# Find out why your teen wants to stay home from school



There's just something about nice weather that urges students to skip school. But if your teen is asking to stay home from school more often than usual this spring, you need to find out why.

Consider the following reasons teens miss school (and what to do about them):

- **Exhaustion.** Teens need a lot of sleep—but between school, clubs, sports, part-time jobs and homework, they often don't get it. Instead of letting your teen sleep in one morning to "catch up," encourage her to stick to a regular sleep schedule—even on weekends. It'll make it easier for her to fall asleep and to wake up in the morning.
- **Incomplete homework.** Ask your teen why she didn't finish the assignment. Is she having trouble

in that class? Have her speak to her teacher about extra help options. Is she just too busy after school to get everything done? Work together to reevaluate her priorities. School and homework must come first.

- **Other students.** Is your teen being bullied? If so, talk to the school. Does your teen feel lonely? Encourage her to join a club or a team. They are great ways for her to meet other people who share her interests.

Source: "Causes/Contributing Factors of Truancy," Project Stay-In, Illinois State Board of Education, <http://mcdonough.k12.il.us/optionaleducation/TAOEP/truancy.htm>.

**"What sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to a human soul."**

—Joseph Addison

# Work with your teen to decrease time spent in front of a screen



When it comes to screen time, the research is clear: Too much of it can hurt your teen's grades and impact his physical well-being. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of screen time per day, but most kids spend five or more hours per day in front of a screen.

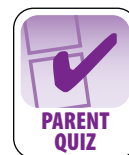
But what "counts" as screen time? You can see when your teen is watching TV (screen time) or playing video games (screen time)—but it's harder to tell if he's using the computer to go on Facebook (screen time) or research ideas for his project (not screen time).

To cut down on screen time, encourage your teen to:

- **Keep a log.** How much time does your teen *really* spend in front of a screen during an average week? Consider keeping your own log and compare your results. Talk about ways to decrease screen time.
- **Head to the library.** Typing key words into Google might be the quickest way to get information for that paper, but the library probably has more in-depth coverage in books.

Source: Valerie Strauss, "The Answer Sheet—How Much Is Too Much Screen Time?" The Washington Post, <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/the-group/the-group-how-much-is-too-much.html>.

# Is your teenager on track for the end of the year?



As the end of the school year draws closer, some teens stop doing homework. They arrive late to class—or even cut class a time or two. Are you helping your teen stay on track right through the last day? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Have you and your teen talked** about her long-term goals? Grades in the last marking period count, too!
2. **Have you checked in** with the school about your teen's attendance?
3. **Are you careful** about where your teen goes with friends? End-of-year parties can sometimes turn into drinking bashes.
4. **Do you help your teen set** small goals with deadlines for large end-of-year projects?
5. **Do you pay close attention** to the grades on homework and projects your teen brings home? If you see grades slipping, will you contact the teacher?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are keeping your teen on track. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

**High School**  
**Parents**  
*still make the difference!*

*Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.* ISSN: 1523-1291

For subscription information call or write:

The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-  
7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May  
by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS,  
Inc., an independent, private agency.  
Equal opportunity employer.  
Copyright © 2010 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Kris Amundson & Jennifer McGovern.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Help your high schooler learn how to master the essay test



An essay test can be an especially intimidating part of high school. For many teens, it helps to break the essay down into three parts: the introduction, the body (usually a paragraph or two) and the conclusion. Share these four tips with your teen:

## 1. Read the question carefully.

If it says:

- “*Discuss*”—make fact-based observations about the topic.
- “*Describe*”—give specific details about the subject matter.
- “*Show*”—point out your idea or opinion and support it with facts.
- “*Explain*”—offer causes or reasons for something. Be factual.

## 2. Write your introduction:

- *Briefly explain* what your essay will be about. A simple way to do this is to restate the original question.

- *Use the third person (he, she or it).* Don't use *I* or *me* unless you've been told to do so.

## 3. Write the body of the essay.

Each paragraph should answer a specific part of the question and should include:

- *A topic sentence.*
- *Information that supports the topic sentence.*
- *A closing sentence.*

## 4. Write the conclusion. Summarize the essay topic (again, restate the original question). Be sure to:

- *State what you've concluded.*
- *Mention how the facts support your position.*

Encourage your teen to take a few minutes before starting to outline her ideas. She should jot down notes having to do with the topic, and then decide how to link them together. Often, these notes can become topic sentences for paragraphs.

**Q:** My son told me he has been playing online poker. He's lost a lot of money, some of which he has charged on my credit card. He is spending less time with his friends. I'm afraid this is affecting his grades in school, too. What can I do to help him stop?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** For many teens, a game or two of cards is a fun way to spend time with friends. But for a small number, the gambling soon gets out of control.

That seems to be what's happened with your son. To help your son get back on track:

- **Talk to your son.** Let him know you're on his side and that you are glad he's come to you for help. Tell him that he needs to recognize that he has a serious gambling problem. Gambling has isolated him from friends and affected his schoolwork. It has put him—and you—in a financial bind. And he seems unable to stop.
  - **Cut off access to the Internet** right away. Move the computer to a central location in your home. Tell your son that he can be on the computer *only* when you are there to supervise.
  - **Get help.** Gambling can become an addiction as powerful as any other. Organizations such as Gamblers Anonymous can help.
  - **Make him take responsibility** for the money he has lost. Help him get a job. Then set up a plan so he can pay you back.
- As the song says, gamblers need to know “when to fold ’em.” Your son's addiction means the time to quit is now.

—Kristen Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# Avoid being an overprotective parent to teach independence



Overprotective parents tend to “rescue” kids from problems to protect them from any pain or suffering. Kids often love this kind of parenting—at the time. But overprotection can prevent them from learning the life skills they'll need as adults.

It's especially important to avoid overprotecting teens. Teenagers need to learn to take care of themselves, especially as they will probably move away from home in a few years.

To make sure you're not an overprotective parent:

- **Avoid rescuing your teen** from small problems. If he has

forgotten his geometry book at school and he has homework to do, he'll have to figure something out. (Obviously, if your child is dealing with a larger problem, like being bullied, it's fine to step in and help him.)

- **Give your teen responsibilities** around the house. Knowing how to do his own laundry, how to make doctors' appointments or how to mow the lawn will definitely come in handy when he's an adult.

Source: Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott, *Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Resolving Conflict with Your Teenage Son or Daughter*, ISBN: 1-5595-8441-6 (Prima Publishing, [www.randomhouse.com/index.pperl](http://www.randomhouse.com/index.pperl)).



# It Matters: Respect

## Have you talked with your teen about integrity?



Even a teen with the best of intentions will make mistakes. He may lie to a friend. He may go to a party he told you he wouldn't attend.

It's important to talk with your teen about acting with integrity. While *morality* is the set of beliefs that help your teen judge what's right and wrong, *integrity* is how he acts on those beliefs.

It's great if your teen says he believes in being honest. But what does he do when his friend asks for the answer to Question 10 on the test? What he does in that minute affects his integrity.

There are going to be times when he makes decisions that he knows are wrong. Some experts say that teens actually learn integrity in those minutes—they gain integrity by losing it.

But that only works if someone helps them think through their choice. Ask your teen:

- **What got in the way** of telling the truth?
- **Were you trying to impress** someone else?
- **Would you have acted** differently if you had been with a different group of people?

Tell your teen that integrity is like a muscle. The more he uses it, the stronger it will become. So when he has to make a tough decision, he should ask one question: Will this action build up my integrity?

**Source:** Michael Riera, *Staying Connected to Your Teenager*, ISBN: 0-738-20845-0 (Perseus Books Group, [www.perseusbooksgroup.com/perseus/home.jsp](http://www.perseusbooksgroup.com/perseus/home.jsp)).

## Regular consequences lead to fewer arguments with your teen

She's missed her curfew. You're too tired to argue about it, so you let it slide. It happens all the time. Parents think they are avoiding an argument by letting their teens break the rules.

And they are—for the moment. But they're really just postponing the battle until the next time they try to enforce the rules.

It's one of the great mysteries of discipline. The more consistently you apply consequences, the less you will have to impose them.

When you're inconsistent, your teen starts to think you don't really mean what you say. The rules really aren't rules—they're more like suggestions. So she'll fight your rules *all* the time. After all, sometimes pushing back works.



On the other hand, if you enforce curfew every time, your teen will almost never fight. She knows what to expect if she breaks the rules, so she's more likely to follow them.

**Source:** Gregory Bodenhamer, *Parent in Control*, ISBN: 0-684-80777-7 (Fireside Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)).

## Help your teen benefit from the effects of community service



Woodrow Wilson, a wartime president, once said, "If you would be a leader, you must lead your own generation, not the next." That's what teen volunteers do every day.

Over the years, researchers have examined many of the positive effects of community service on teens. They include:

- **Respect.** Teens who volunteer learn to respect others and themselves. As they work to solve problems, they gain new skills. They see the results of their work. They gain the respect not only of

their peers, but also of adults and community members.

- **Leadership skills.** Teens who participate in community service learn how to organize others. They know how to work in teams. Those are skills they can use in the classroom today and in the workplace tomorrow.
- **The "coolness factor."** Other teens think that those who volunteer are cool. They respect them as leaders and look up to them.

**Source:** Jim Stratton, "Today's Volunteers—Tomorrow's Leaders," Boys and Girls Clubs of America, [www.bgca.org/connections/05\\_summer/story3.html](http://www.bgca.org/connections/05_summer/story3.html).