

High School Parents[®]

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Improve your teen's writing with six simple strategies

Your teen will be expected to do a lot of writing in high school. Before turning in a history report or answering an essay question, she should remember to review it for obvious problems.

Here are six editing tips to share with your teen:

1. **Track with your finger.** Have your teen read slowly, word by word, to check for mistakes. Often, a careless error can mean the difference between a good grade and a poor one.
2. **Spelling and sound.** Many English words sound alike. Teens who know better may still confuse words like *there* and *their*.
3. **Capital letters.** Check to see they are used at the beginning of each

sentence. Capitals should also be used for proper names and at the beginning of a quotation.

4. **Umph.** All writing needs a little pizzazz. Have her use interesting details or a unique point of view to make the writing her own.
5. **Punctuation.** Do sentences end with a period or question mark? Are commas used correctly? Check for proper use of apostrophes (and pay attention to the difference between *its* and *it's*. The latter means "it is.")
6. **Support.** Does the essay include interesting examples? Is there support for the main idea?

Source: Karen Donohue, *180 Days to Successful Writers*, ISBN: 1-412-92449-9 (Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Promote good attendance by setting goals



Research conducted by the National Center for School Engagement has identified many

factors contributing to truancy. Here are just a few:

- **Safety issues**, such as violence on the way to and from school.
- **Family health** or financial concerns that cause students to care for family or work during school hours.
- **Negative role models**, such as friends who skip school.

The study also developed a program to combat the effects of each factor. One surprising component was *teaching teens to set goals*. Once teens understood that education is a way to achieve long-term goals, they were more likely to attend school regularly.

Give your teen opportunities to set and achieve goals at home. When he is comfortable setting and achieving small goals, he'll feel more confident about setting and achieving bigger, long-term goals—such as graduating high school and pursuing a career.

Source: "Facts on Truancy," National Center for School Engagement, <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/truancy/pdf/FactsonTruancy.pdf>.

Prompt your teen to think about consequences, consider risks



New brain research confirms what parents have always suspected: Even the brightest teen lacks a fully-developed

brain. The part of the brain that develops last (the frontal lobes) governs decision-making. It's also the part of the brain that helps us think through the consequences of our actions.

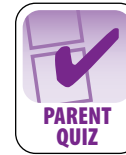
This knowledge may help you understand why your teen answers the question, "How could you do that?" by saying, "It seemed like a good idea at the time." So your task, right through the teen years, is to *be your teen's brain*.

You will need to draw your teen's attention to the consequences and possible risks of her actions. Prompt her to think about situations by asking questions like, "If you go out tonight, will you have enough time to finish your history project?" "What will you do if there's alcohol at the party?"

Remember, when it comes to questionable or risky situations, you always have the option of saying *no*. Just because your teen really wants to go to a party doesn't mean you have to say *yes*.

Source: Robert Sylwester, *The Adolescent Brain*, ISBN: 978-1-4129-2611-9 (Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Are you staying involved in your teenager's life?



Teens can be secretive creatures. So staying involved with a teen's life presents a parent with special challenges. While

you can't force your teen to communicate, you can do things to keep the lines open.

See how you're doing by answering *yes* or *no* to each statement below:

- ___ 1. I know where my teen is. If she's out with friends and plans change, she knows to call to tell me where she will be.
 - ___ 2. I spend some time each day with my teen. Often, it's just "hanging out" time—in the car, preparing dinner, watching TV. These are the times when communication happens most naturally.
 - ___ 3. I attend school events.
 - ___ 4. I encourage my teen's friends to make our home a place where they can spend time. When they're there, I don't leave.
 - ___ 5. I plan regular one-on-one time for my teen and me to do something we both enjoy.
- How well are you doing?**
Each *yes* means you're doing a good job of creating ways for your teen to keep in touch. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Use the family car to teach your teen lessons in responsibility



It's happened: Your teen finally got his driver's license. If he's like most teens, he probably takes this for granted, as a right more than a privilege. If you're like most parents, you disagree—driving is a privilege, dependent on many factors, including responsibility.

This is a great time to teach your teen about responsibility, by using:

- **The car.** Show him how to fill the gas tank, check the oil, check the tire pressure and how to change a flat tire. Point out that a dirty car will eventually be a rusted car—which is an undriveable car. Make these chores his responsibility.
- **Errands.** Talk to your teen about how he can contribute to the family with his driver's license. He can run some of your errands, such as dropping by the grocery store on the way home from school.

- **His friends.** Many teens think of driving as "freedom." They can finally go wherever they want with their friends! Make your teen responsible for replacing the gas that he uses when driving the car. The price of gas these days will drastically shorten any road trips he wants to take.

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Work with the school by making sure your teen is ready to learn



You're undoubtedly aware of the importance of working with your teen's school. You attend the parent-teacher conferences, read notices from school and join the parent-teacher organization. Working with your teen's school as a team in these ways contributes to his success.

There's another way you can work with your teen's school—without leaving your home. It's by sending your teen to school "ready to learn." Here's how:

- **Make sure your teen** gets enough sleep. He's probably very busy with homework and activities, but getting enough sleep (eight or more hours) will ensure that his brain is awake when he gets to school.
- **Insist on breakfast.** Studies have shown that students who eat breakfast are more alert and achieve more than students who skip the "most important meal of the day."
- **Monitor homework.** It's difficult to help with homework in high school, especially in advanced science and math classes. But you can make sure your teen is completing homework by asking to look it over when he's finished. Also provide a quiet, well-lit place for him to study.
- **Talk about school.** Simply talking about what your teen learned at school each day shows him that you think school is important. Knowing you care about school will affect how he feels about it. He may try harder as a result.

Make communicating with your teen more productive by listening



For many parents, "communication" means "I talk; you listen." The truth is that the best way to communicate with your teen is to listen more.

So try an experiment. On a sticky note, write just one word: *Listen*. Put it on your mirror where you will see it in the morning. Try to spend a whole day really listening to your teen.

Sit down when your teen is watching TV. Ask your teen to help you in the kitchen. Prepare a favorite snack when she walks in the door from school.

If you make yourself available, your teen is likely to share a worry, a

concern or a thought. That's when the real challenge will start. You could hear some things that may surprise or even shock you. As much as possible, try to keep listening. Make eye contact with your teen. Nod your head.

Ask questions to keep your teen talking. "What happened then?" Or just ask, "What do you think about this?"

Helen Keller said, "Deafness is darker by far than blindness." When you do all the talking, you might as well be deaf—because you aren't hearing what's on your teen's mind.

Source: Bernie Siegel, *Love, Magic & Mudpies: Raising Your Kids to Feel Loved, Be Kind and Make a Difference*, ISBN: 1-594-86554-X (Rodale Press, 1-800-848-4735, www.rodale.com).

Q: The college envelopes are starting to arrive, and my teen is heartbroken. He had his heart set on one particular school and he didn't get in. He is really upset. How can I help my son move on and face next year with a positive outlook?

Questions & Answers

A: This is a cruel time of year for seniors. When they don't get the fat envelope (with the college acceptance inside), they think life is over. Here's how to help:

- **Ask your son** why that college was his first choice. Kids (and parents) can get wrapped up in looking for the college that ranks highest. Yet what they should be looking for is the school that's the best fit.
- **Redirect your son.** Have the conversation you had last year. Ask him what he is looking for in a college. Which of the schools that have accepted him is most likely to meet those goals? Now he can make a positive choice for a different school.
- **Share your own experiences.** When were you disappointed by not getting your first choice? How did you cope, and how did things turn out? Help your teen see that life throws us all some curve balls. What's important is what we do with the choices we are given.
- **Give him hope.** There are still ways your son can get into his first choice school. If he gets good grades his freshman year, he can apply to transfer. But perhaps by then he'll be settled in his new college and won't want to leave.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Test Preparation

Share test-taking secrets with your teen for success



Standardized tests: The very words strike terror into the hearts of many teens. Teens know that a lot is riding on their

test scores—from class placement to admission to college or technical school to graduation.

Many teens find standardized tests difficult because the tests ask questions about familiar topics in unfamiliar ways. Something as simple as $4 + 6$ could show up as a word problem, an algebraic equation or even a multiple choice question.

Teach your teen these strategies to conquer standardized tests:

- **Read the directions carefully.** You may lose points if you don't follow the directions *exactly!*
- **Skim questions** before you begin.
- **Read the entire question**—and all of the answer choices—before responding. Look for words like *not, only, except for, all of the above* or *none of the above*.
- **Realize that only one answer** is the “best” answer.
- **Answer the questions** you're sure of before moving on to the ones you're less sure of.
- **Circle key words** in long questions to find the main point.
- **Restate complicated questions** in your own words.
- **Answer every question**—unless you'll lose more points for an incorrect answer than for not responding.

Source: “Help Your Child Improve in Test-Taking,” U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/TestTaking/index.html.

Let your teen manage anxiety with stress-relieving strategies

Whether they are preparing for their driver's test or a big state exam, today's teens have to learn how to perform well under pressure. Teens who are stressed may end up performing poorly.

Here's how you can help your teen manage test stress:

- **Put things in perspective.** 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. If your teen does poorly on a test, that doesn't mean he is a failure.
- **Teach relaxation techniques.** Teach your teen to tense and then relax muscles. Start by tightening the toes, counting to three, and then relaxing. Move up the legs, arms, shoulders,



neck and head. After doing this, your teen will feel more relaxed.

- **Visualize.** Athletes practice “seeing” themselves making the goal. They say this rehearsal makes it easier when game time comes. Help your teen do the same, picturing himself feeling confident and prepared.

Source: Scott Mandel, *Improving Test Scores*, ISBN: 1-569-76202-3 (Zephyr Press, an imprint of Chicago Review Press, 1-800-232-2187, www.zephyrpress.com).

Talk with your teen about the purpose, importance of tests



Research shows that students are more likely to be motivated to do their best on and study hard for tests when they understand *why* they're taking a test and *why* it's important. If you're not sure, ask your teen's teachers.

Then talk to your teen about the purpose of the test. Standardized tests, for example, show students, parents and teachers how well students are learning compared to

other students around the state or country.

Remind your teen that test-taking is a part of life. She'll have to pass a test to get a driver's license and for some careers, such as those in medicine and law.

Becoming comfortable with taking tests now will help your teen succeed in school—and in life.

Source: Cengiz Gulek, “Preparing for High-Stakes Testing,” *Theory Into Practice*, Winter 2003 (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1-800-926-6579, www.erlbaum.com).