

5 Tips to Help Your Teen Get the Most Out of High School

All parents want to see their kids succeed in high school and beyond, but knowing how to help them along the way isn't always a simple task. Not only have times changed since we ourselves were teens, but also teens tend to sometimes struggle with communicating their needs. It's easy to see how a parent might feel a little lost when it comes to helping a high school student towards success.

In this post, we'll discuss how to support your high school student and help him or her to get the most out of high school. Though our experience working with thousands of college bound students proves that the path to success varies widely, we have some general tips for maximizing the high school experience. Keep reading to learn more.

1) Provide Physical Tools for Success

As kids age, it's easy to step back from some of the basic needs that they're capable of managing on their own. They probably don't have a bedtime anymore, and the days of forcing them to eat their broccoli are likely long gone. That said, just because your teen doesn't need you to tuck him or her in anymore, that doesn't mean you can't ensure that he or she is taking good physical care of him or herself.

Start with sleep. Teens need a lot of sleep (as evidenced by many at 10AM on a Saturday morning). Be sure that your teen gets the sleep he or she needs by enforcing quiet times in the house after a certain hour. Some parents even find it helpful to turn off the wifi or confiscate devices that might tempt a teen to stay up later than necessary. With many high schools now starting well before 8AM, getting to bed at a decent hour is integral to your teen's ability to get up and go in the morning.

Also teach your teen about basic nutrition. Students who eat a healthy breakfast with a good balance of protein and carbs and without heavy sugar are better able to concentrate and sustain their energy throughout the morning. Making sure that the pantry is stocked with a few quick, grab and go options for busy mornings can be a great help in making sure that your teen starts the day right.

2) Build Mental Tools for Success

Another way to set your teen up for high school success is to help him or her begin with the frame of mind. Let your teen know that you don't expect him or her to be perfect, that you love him or her unconditionally, and that you'll always be available to help if he or she asks. Knowing that someone cares about his or her progress and is available to help along the way will provide your teen confidence as he or she tackles high school.

3) Help With Organization

Though they are starting to look like adults, teens are still developing the portion of their brain that controls executive function and things like time management and organization. You can help him or her to fine-tune these skills by providing organizational tools like a planner, family calendar, or organization app.

Set these tools up with your teen so that you know he or she knows how to access them and use them efficiently. Then, check in every once in a while to make sure that the system is still working.

4) Build a Home-School Connection

Many high schools are less inclined to build relationships with families the way that elementary and middle schools do. They believe that as students become more mature and independent, this connection becomes less important.

In reality though, students whose families stay connected to the school community are often more likely to succeed academically and stay involved in extracurriculars. As a parent, you can nurture this connection by maintaining open communications with your teen, checking attendance tallies, and attending school events. Let your student know that your family is invested in his or her success and wants to be a part of it.

Even if you don't understand some of your teen's academic work, encourage him or her to talk about it at home. Ask questions about assignments, listen to what interests your teen, and welcome any discussion about school events or incidents. Try to invite these conversations without judgment or advice. Instead, keep an open mind and be glad that your teen is opening up at all.

You should also feel free to communicate with your teen's teachers. Some teens seem to think this is embarrassing or unnecessary past the elementary school years, but having someone who can lend outside perspective and keep an eye on your student while he or she's at school is a great thing.

You should also visit the school website and calendar frequently. Make sure you read handouts or emails that are sent home and stay on top of current events in the school community.

5) Provide Outside Support As Necessary

Sometimes, the challenges of the teenage years are beyond the scope of what the average parent can handle. Other times, your teen simply responds better to an outside influence. Be ready and willing to seek help if you think your teen needs someone else in his or her corner.

If your teen experiences sudden changes in mood or seems to be struggling socially, consider the help of a counselor or other trained mental health professional. Though your teen might seem resistant at first, stigma of mental health issues should never deter someone from having an evaluation.

If your teen struggles academically, consider a tutor or study group. Sometimes simply having someone explain a concept in a new way or reinforce an operation with additional practice is all your student needs.