

High School Parents[®]

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Gadsden City Schools

still make the difference!



Five ways to keep your teen reading over winter break

Students will soon be on a break from school, but it's important that they stay in the habit of reading. Regular reading helps teens unplug from technology, ease stress and keep their minds sharp.

Here are a few simple ways to incorporate reading during your teen's time off:

- 1. Bring books on trips.** If your family will be traveling, make sure your teen brings some reading material and perhaps an audiobook. It will help beat the boredom along the way—and keep reading skills sharp at the same time.
- 2. Get cooking.** Whether you're preparing a holiday meal or just baking cookies, ask for help. Your teen can read and follow recipe directions—and practice math skills when measuring out ingredients.
- 3. Take a trip to the local library** together. Suggest your teen check out and read a book for pleasure. Ask the librarian to suggest a few popular titles.
- 4. Give the gift of reading.** If your family will exchange gifts this month, consider giving your teen a magazine subscription or the first book in a series as a gift.
- 5. Encourage reading aloud.** Your teen could read a book to a younger sibling or an older relative who can't see well. You can ask your teen to read you a few interesting articles while you cook or clean up. Or, check out several copies of a play and have a family readers' theater night.

Sitting up front can keep teens alert in class



Studies have found that students who sit in the front of the classroom tend to perform better than those sitting in the back. Sitting in the front can help your high schooler:

- **Stay alert.** When teachers can see them, students are less likely to become distracted, talk to classmates or fall asleep.
- **Take better notes.** Sitting up front makes it easier to see and hear what's going on.
- **Become more engaged.** Students' increased awareness of class content makes it easier for them to participate—which can help them get more out of the class.
- **Build confidence.** With better listening, more class discussions and better note-taking, students feel capable of doing well in school.

If your teen has an assigned seat and can't sit up front, don't worry. Your student can still arrive on time, focus on the teacher and strive to participate in every class.

Source: P. Will and others, "The impact of classroom seating location and computer use on student academic performance," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

Share the facts about underage drinking with your high schooler



According to health experts, 60 percent of teens have had at least one alcoholic drink by age 18. And studies

show that teenage drinking poses serious health and safety risks.

Share these facts with your teen:

- **Teens who start drinking** before the age of 15 are twice as likely to become addicted as those who wait until 21. They are also more likely to commit suicide.
- **Alcohol increases** impulsive behavior and provokes teens to make foolish decisions that can lead to serious injury or death.
- **Underage drinking increases** teens' risk of being physically or sexually assaulted.

So what can families do?

- **Check where your teen** is going and with whom. If there is a party,

find out if there will be adults present and if alcohol will be served.

- **Remind your teen** *never* to get into a car with someone who has been drinking. Develop a code your teen can use when calling you that means "Please come get me!"
- **Watch your teen** carefully for signs of depression. Sometimes, teens use alcohol as a way to medicate themselves.

Source: "Underage Drinking," National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

"The consequences of underage drinking can affect everyone—regardless of age or drinking status."

—National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Family expectations set the stage for academic success



Research shows that family expectations have a significant impact on high school students' achievement.

One study found that:

- **Teens strive to reach** their family's expectations of them. If you make it clear you believe your teen can work hard and succeed in school, your student is likely to achieve more academically than if you don't.
- **Teens' expectations** for themselves begin to match the expectations their families have for them. If you say things like "I want you to give schoolwork your best effort and graduate," your high schooler will begin to have the same expectations.

To offer inspiration:

- **Talk about** what your teen hopes to achieve in high school and beyond.
- **Help your teen** set attainable goals, such as improving a grade in a class.
- **Emphasize the value of learning** and improvement. Saying "You worked really hard on that and it shows" teaches your teen that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work.
- **Discuss the future.** Compare your dreams for your teen with your teen's own. Say that you have confidence in your teen and you will always be there for support.

Source: J.M. Froiland and M.L. Davison, "Parental expectations and school relationships as contributors to adolescents' positive outcomes," *Social Psychology of Education*, Springer.

Are you helping your teen prepare for the future?



It can be scary for teens to think about life after high school. Should they go to college? What should they study? Answer *yes* or

no to the questions below to find out if you are helping your teen prepare for the future:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about careers of interest and the education or training required?
- ___ **2. Have you encouraged** your teen to take advantage of career planning services available at school?
- ___ **3. Have you suggested** that your teen try to shadow a person in a field of interest?
- ___ **4. Have you helped** your teen create a résumé that lists academic achievements, work experience, workplace skills and community service?
- ___ **5. Are you helping your teen** plan for a productive summer? It's not too early to create a plan. Your teen could take a class at a community college or get a job related to a career.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're giving your teen support preparing for the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Mind mapping can strengthen your teen's comprehension skills



Minds work a lot like websites. From one main idea, our thoughts tend to link to other related ideas. Those are linked to still more ideas.

One effective way for students to remember something new is to create a link to something they already know. Creating a mind map is a helpful technique. Mind mapping is a visual and logical way of note-taking that literally “maps out” ideas and represents them graphically.

When studying a new subject, your teen can:

1. **Write down the main word** or phrase of that subject in the center of a piece of paper and circle it.
2. **Write down all related words** or phrases that come to mind

around the circled word. Have your high schooler use overlapping circles or arrows to connect items. The goal is to get as many ideas down on paper as quickly as possible.

3. **Edit the map.** This might mean moving some items closer to related ideas or using color to help organize the concepts. Your teen can also add drawings and symbols. While reading about the subject, your teen can add new information to the map, working outward. As the map expands, the added details should be more specific.

After completing the mind map, your teen will have a personal map that puts the new information into the context of previously learned material.

Encourage your teen to build skills through volunteering



Volunteering is an effective way for teens to build school and life skills such as responsibility, discipline and

teamwork. When teens participate in community service, they contribute to society—and to their own future.

Volunteer work can help teens:

- **Explore and discover** new interests.
- **Gain work experience** and build organizational, leadership and social skills.
- **Boost confidence.** Experts agree that helping strangers increases teens' feelings of self-worth.
- **Widen their network.** Teens will get to know people from a variety of backgrounds and generations. They may even find a mentor.

- **Enhance college applications.** Many colleges view community service as a valuable learning experience.

Your teen may be able to:

- **Serve meals** at a soup kitchen.
- **Collect blankets** and pet food for an animal shelter.
- **Work at a food pantry**, sorting donated goods.
- **Organize** a food or clothing drive.
- **Send letters** of thanks to veterans.
- **Tutor younger students** in a subject.
- **Collect items** for a homeless shelter.
- **Participate** in a community cleanup to beautify local neighborhoods.

To find volunteer opportunities in your area, encourage your teen to contact the school counselor, local libraries, religious organizations and community service groups.

Q: My 10th grader is taking Spanish this year and is having a difficult time. My teen puts forth serious effort, but still earns low grades in the class. How can I support my high schooler when trying hard doesn't seem like enough?

Questions & Answers

A: Life isn't always fair. Some students can master a subject without much effort. Others work really hard but still struggle.

That's no reason for your teen—or you—to give up. There are some strategies that may help your high schooler turn things around. There are also effective ways you can provide support.

Suggest that your teen:

- **Talk with the teacher** and discuss how your teen spends study time.. What problems does the teacher see? What does the teacher think your teen could do differently?
- **Devote more time** to Spanish for now. Encourage your teen to spend at least 20 minutes a day learning vocabulary words with flash cards or an app. Later in the study session, your teen can work on reading or verbs.
- **Review past lessons.** Suggest working through past assignments. After hitting a stumbling block, your teen may be able to pinpoint where the problem started.
- **Seek extra help.** Could the teacher work with your teen during office hours. If not, your teen should ask about tutoring resources, such as student tutors or online programs. With a strong work ethic, consistent communication with the teacher and your help, your teen can rise to meet this challenge!

It Matters: Test Prep

Teach your teen this five-day study program



High school students face a variety of tests, but with a simple, structured study program, they can feel

confident and prepared for everything from history quizzes to math final exams.

Encourage your teen to follow these steps:

- **Four days before the test**, gather everything that will be covered on the test. This includes class notes, outlines, quizzes and handouts. Arrange them by date.
- **Three days before the test**, read everything over. Make a list of facts likely to be on the test. Did the teacher spend four days going over the parts of a cell? Odds are, that will show up on test day. Make flash cards of facts to memorize, or create a quiz and practice recalling the information. (Visit quizlet.com for free online study tools.)
- **Two days before the test**, look through assigned readings. Focus on major titles and key topics to create a list of potential short- and long-answer questions. Choose a few of these questions and outline how to answer them.
- **One day before the test**, create and take a self-quiz. Try to recall and write memorized material correctly. Apply math or science formulas by using them to solve sample problems.
- **The day of the test**, repeat the previous day's tasks. Collect and bring all allowed materials (notes, calculators, etc.) to class.

Try four proven strategies to reduce your teen's test anxiety

Does your high schooler's stomach do flip-flops at the thought of a big test? Although you can't take the test for your teen, you can offer a great deal of support.

To reduce test anxiety:

1. **Ask your teen questions** such as, "Why do you think you are so nervous about the test? Is the material too hard? Do you not understand it?" Sometimes just talking things out can make the test seem less scary.
2. **Help your teen make** a study schedule, setting aside study time on each of the days leading up to it. (Check out the five-day study plan to the left.)
3. **Create a comfy study spot.** Carve out a quiet, well-lit place at home designated for studying. Encourage your teen to gather all needed supplies *before* sitting down to study—including a



healthy snack and a glass of water. Reduce distractions and limit interruptions.

4. **Remind your teen of strengths.** "I know you're worried about the big science test, but remember how well you did on the last one? Apply that same effort and I know you will be successful!"

Help your high school student prepare physically for tests



In addition to studying over several days for a test, high school students need to prepare physically. Encourage your teen to:

- **Get plenty of sleep.** Brains work best when they are well-rested. Make sure your teen gets at least eight hours of sleep for several nights leading up to a test.
- **Set an alarm clock.** Your teen might set a backup alarm, too—to avoid oversleeping.
- **Dress comfortably.** Sometimes, classrooms feel too hot or too cold, so your teen should dress in layers.
- **Eat a low-sugar breakfast.** Healthy food fuels the body and mind, giving your teen energy to focus. Your teen should avoid a big meal, which could lead to sleepiness.
- **Show up early.** Students should allow least five minutes before the test begins to get settled. Your teen can get out necessary supplies and take a few deep breaths.