

ACTION INFORMATION SHEET

Parents Play Vital Role in Teenagers' Education: Try These Ideas to Help Your Teen

How do you encourage your teenager to be successful at school? While being involved in your teen's education may be challenging, nearly everybody agrees that parent involvement in education is important – teachers, parents, and policymakers work to increase parent involvement in many ways.

Unfortunately, research shows that parent involvement declines as children move into middle and high school and most involvement programs focus on the elementary level. It's still important for you to be involved in your child's education during the teen years, but you may need to try different strategies to stay connected. Try the following suggestions at home and at your child's school to stay involved in your teen's learning.

AT HOME

Help your child dream for the future

Parents can help teens be specific about what needs to happen so they can have the adult life of their dreams. When teens feel like talking about it, ask for details of their dreams. Asking "which college" or "what kind of job seems most interesting" can help your teen form concrete goals, either about college, technical training, or career choices. At this point, giving them something to aim for is more important than the specific job or career choice.

Motivate your child with high expectations

The evidence is overwhelming: Parents' high expectations improve teens' success. In fact, high expectations are the most significant influences on high school seniors' achievement growth, credits completed, and whether the student will become a lifelong learner. When children

experience high and realistic expectations, they understand and adopt the high value the family places on education. Regular encouragement and discussions about school and higher education also promote students' college or training aspirations and preparation.

Help with homework

Parents can help a teen with homework even if they don't remember chemistry, literature, or geometry. First, it's important to agree on a time and place for homework. Many teens enjoy doing homework with friends. This can be a great way to make sure homework is completed, though it might take longer than it would by working alone.

Parents can also help by asking questions, especially those that connect current work to prior knowledge. For example, ask: "What do you know about this already?" Providing access to books, the Internet, calculators, and other resources is another way parents can help their teenager. Finally, remember that learning is a skill and parents are more experienced learners than children. If your teen doesn't understand an assignment, help him or her think of specific questions to ask the teacher during the next class.

Focus your teen's time

Helping your child use time wisely is important for a variety of reasons. Parental monitoring can help your child avoid risky behaviors and build life skills that will be important after high school. As a parent, you can encourage extracurricular activities, which can be an important factor in college admissions. Limit the use of television, video games, and computers to help your child focus on school work. As children age, parents shift from managing their child's schedule to providing advice and supervision. This role is just as important!

Encourage reading for pleasure

Students need to read to learn, and parents can encourage leisure reading at home to build reading skills. Even reluctant readers can increase their vocabulary and comprehension, grammar, and spelling skills if they find something enjoyable to read.

How can parents help? First, talk with teens about what interests them, says Alicia Anderson, Teen Services librarian at Hennepin County Library. Choose materials based on their interests and widen your ideas about reading materials. Magazines, non-fiction, or how-to books might interest your teen more than a novel. Also consider other alternatives. Graphic novels (which are similar to comic books, but longer), short stories, or novels in prose or journal format can be read quickly and can give a reluctant reader a sense of accomplishment.

If your son or daughter is interested only in sports magazines, make sure he or she has a good supply.

Visit the library and encourage your teen to ask the librarians for help. They can help find materials your teen will enjoy. Anderson also suggests that parents let teens choose their own books and respect their choices.

AT SCHOOL

Connect with others

Knowing others in the school community is an important way to support children as they grow through their teens. You may have questions or problems, and another parent or staff member who knows the system can help. Try to keep in touch with a teacher, counselor, active parent, or other member of the school staff a few times a year.

It would be helpful to meet the parents of your child's friends. This is a great way to learn how your teen is interacting with other youth, as well as to share ideas with other adults in your child's life. Some families have created groups to share phone numbers and names with each other.

Communicate with school

Communication may bring challenges during the teen years. Adolescents may be distracted and some teens may be reluctant to bring home notices if they don't want parents to participate in a conference or event. Some teens may not communicate because they fear parents' reactions. Despite some of these challenges, your child looks to you to provide guidance with school matters. The good news is your involvement makes a positive difference.

If challenges arise, focus on what your teen can do to overcome them and provide possible solutions. This will increase the likelihood of good communication. Parents can also help teens remember to communicate by regularly asking about messages from school. Parents can also access the school's website to

directly access information about events as well as student information such as grades and assignments.

Support teachers

Make a point to have positive, face-to-face contact with teachers early in the year to demonstrate support for their role. Even though middle and high school students have many teachers each day, it's important to show your support. Doing so will make it easier for you to work with a teacher if questions occur later in the year.

Plan classes

One critical way for parents to be connected is discussing education and choosing challenging classes with their teen. Though students may have several advisors helping them make course selections, parents should be engaged as well. Parents will want to make sure their teen meets all graduation requirements, and they may also want to encourage their teen to meet course requirements for college admission.

There are also opportunities for students to earn college credit while still in high school. In Minnesota, students can choose from many options, several at no cost. Ask your teen's school counselor about options and encourage your teen to participate. Sometimes the motivation of taking college classes and the challenge of more difficult material can encourage a teen to perform well.

Make sure your teen takes standardized tests

Beginning in middle school, students may take several standardized tests in addition to the state-required Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA II). Students must do well on the MCA II to graduate. It's also important that students take other tests, such as the ACT (formerly known as American College Testing) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). Scores on these tests are used in the college admissions process and many students take them in 11th grade. Other tests can help families make decisions about high school courses and student interests. They include pre-tests to the ACT called Explore (8th grade) and Plan (10th grade) and the pre-test to the SAT called the Preliminary SAT®/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) taken in 10th grade or earlier. High scores can qualify students for special programs.

Participate in decision-making at school

Being involved at the school building can be just as important in middle and high school as it was in elementary school. Parents may join parent teacher organizations, site councils, or advisory committees just as they did when their children were younger. In middle and high school, parents may also be able to join booster clubs and event committees or become an activity coordinator. Showing support for your teen, the school, and education can be a great way to encourage not only your child, but others as well.