

Helping Your Teenager Get the Most Out of School

Looking at Academics and Activities: Keeping a Proper Balance:

For many parents, dealing with a teenager is perplexing. Teenagers require special patience and wisdom. This article addresses some of the common concerns—particularly how you can help make the school years more productive.

Good study habits

We know teenagers insist they can work in front of the TV or with the stereo at ear-breaking decibel levels. Research shows otherwise. So here are some tips to help your child develop good habits and do his/her best in school. Provide a time and place to work. Show interest in your child's work. Ask questions, but don't nag and don't offer to do the work. Make your child understand the consequences when assignments are not completed. Express your concern, but don't aggravate the situation by berating or scolding. Teenagers often rebel against pressure. Be skeptical if you constantly hear, "I don't have any homework," or "I did it in study hall." If grades aren't good, ask why. Get a clear answer. Contact the school if you're unsure. Set an example. Turn off the TV. Read. Discuss your work, what you're reading, why education is important to you personally.

Extracurricular activities

Most secondary schools offer many activities beyond the school day. They range from sports to artistic pursuits to academic enrichment. Encourage children to participate in the activities that interest them. Extracurricular activities are not only fun, they teach leadership skills, encourage teamwork, and foster responsibility. One word of caution: To some teenagers, these activities become more important than school work. Students must recognize that these are supplements to, not substitutes for, their major goal: a good education. Many schools restrict participation in activities unless students meet certain academic standards. Check the policy at your school.

Planning for the future

Throughout the secondary school years, the question of "What will I do after I graduate?" becomes increasingly important. Early planning is helpful, but flexibility is even more crucial. What are the keys to planning for the future? A solid educational program is important for every student. A teenager's goals often change over the years. A broad, well-rounded education will mean greater opportunities, no matter what decision the student finally makes. A student's individual abilities and interests are foremost. It is tempting to plan a child's life—what you think he or she should be, or even what you wanted to be. But your feelings and abilities may be vastly different from your children's. Each child is an individual with special talents and capabilities. Schools and parents need to help each child recognize and develop those talents.

College is great, but it's not for everyone

Many students elect to go to a traditional four-year institution. For most of them, the choice is correct. But continuing education and learning can take other forms—for example, community college, vocational school, or apprenticeship. The choice needs to be based on the student's needs and interests. Entering the world of work is just as "honorable" as going to school. And perhaps getting more education is simply a matter of time— that is, when the individual is ready.

Help is available from the school

Every student is assigned a counselor, someone who knows the educational background of your child and who has expertise in career and educational opportunities. Counselors also have information on colleges: their programs, entrance requirements, costs, and so forth, as well as information on sources of financial aid. Most school libraries have information on careers. Most schools even provide career counseling programs. Encourage your teenager to use the school's resources. Feel free to contact these sources yourself. Working with teenagers is a challenge. Cooperative efforts between the school and parents make that job easier for everyone!

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