

TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL TEENS

COUNTDOWN TO COLLEGE

Helping Your Teen Prepare For College
There's A Lot You Can Do Now

BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

RESPONDING TO YOUR TEEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL NEEDS BOTH AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL WILL HELP YOU BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS.

AT HOME

- Establish a routine for study
- Develop a calendar to help your teens stay on track
- Ensure that they have comfortable, quiet places to study, as well as the necessary resources
- Provide help when needed
- Respect effort
- Recognize that doing one's best is success
- Encourage positive work habits
- Emphasize the importance of school with actions, as well as words

AT SCHOOL

- Show that you care by attending school activities
- Get to know the teachers and school administrators
- Know who to call for specific information
- Understand the school policies, particularly how they apply to student evaluation, the grading system and graduation requirements
- Monitor your teens' progress by staying in touch with teachers
- Contact teachers; don't wait for them to contact you
- Stay informed by reading newsletters and visiting the school Web site
- Consider volunteering

YOUR TEEN'S ACADEMIC PROGRAM

THE COURSES YOUR TEENS TAKE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL (JUNIOR HIGH) WILL LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULA. IF THEY HAVE A STRONG EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AT THIS LEVEL, THEY WILL BE COMPETITIVE IN HIGH SCHOOL COURSES AND WILL HAVE THE NECESSARY SKILLS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN COLLEGE.

GRADES

6

ENGLISH*
MATH
SCIENCE
SOCIAL STUDIES
INTRO TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE
ART/MUSIC
PE.

7

ENGLISH*
MATH
SCIENCE
SOCIAL STUDIES BEGINNING
FOREIGN LANGUAGE
ART/MUSIC
PE.

8

ENGLISH*
PRE/ALGEBRA OR ALGEBRA
SCIENCE
SOCIAL STUDIES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE I
ART/MUSIC/ TECHNOLOGY
PE.

*Make sure the English classes offer grammar, writing and literature.

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STANDARDIZED TESTS

WHILE TEENS' COURSEWORK GRADES ARE MOST IMPORTANT, THEIR SCORES ON STANDARDIZED TESTS CAN HELP YOU GAUGE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.

Schools offer local, state and national exams so that your teens' scores can be measured across several groups.

The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) exam is given every other year to students in eighth grade in reading and math. Results of scores are presented in three ranges, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

MATH SCORE RANGE=0-500

BASIC=262 PROFICIENT=299 ADVANCED=333

READING SCORE RANGE=0-500

BASIC=243 PROFICIENT=281 ADVANCED=323

(Courtesy Educational Testing Service 2006–2007)

Ask your teens' school counselors about NAEP and other tests and make sure you find out when they are administered and when the results are available. Arrange meetings to go over test results with the appropriate staff. These results may help you tailor teens' academic programs and their study time at home.

IDENTIFY INTEREST

YOUR TEEN IS BECOMING THEIR OWN PERSON. AS A PARENT YOU SHOULD ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT YOUR TEEN'S INTERESTS, AND YOU CAN DO SO IN SEVERAL WAYS:

- Spend time with teens and listen to what they talk about
- Look at what they read for fun
- Watch TV with teens and listen to their reactions
- Encourage them to participate in after-school activities
- If they like music, consider private music lessons
- If they like sports, encourage sports in and/or out of school
- Make time to attend concerts and athletic competitions
- Talk about the importance of developing and sustaining friendships through extracurricular activities

Helping them learn more about what they enjoy shows them that you value their interests and, by extension, that you value them. This will help you better communicate with your teen.

COMMUNICATION

SOME PARENTS AND TEENS COMPLAIN ABOUT THEIR INABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY—HERE ARE SOME TIPS THAT MIGHT HELP:

- Spend time together (i.e., playing games and outdoor activities)
- Find time to talk and listen, over meals, in the car or while watching TV together
- Talk about risky and responsible behavior
- Discuss the importance of having and honoring values
- Ask other parents how they communicate
- Be a good role model when communicating with your own friends
- Listen and do not judge
- Ask teens what they think about certain issues
- Independent of what grades teens receive, always ask them what they think. You learn more when you ask questions.

LEARNING HOW TO STUDY

IT IS NO SURPRISE TO YOU AS PARENTS THAT GOOD STUDY SKILLS CAN HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL. YOUR JOB IS TO PROVIDE A NURTURING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT SO THAT TEENS WANT TO LEARN.

Now that your teens are taking more courses, you can begin to teach them how to develop their personalized schedule, which includes school and activities outside of school. This schedule can be kept in their rooms or on the refrigerator, as well as in their school notebooks.

At home, teach them how to study smart and efficiently by:

- Identifying a comfortable place in the home to study
- Clearing off the desk or workplace; only include relevant material
- Making sure they have all the materials they need
- Encouraging them to study at the same time every day if possible. Regular study time is ideal
- Making sure the space is quiet (Some teens like studying with music, and that's fine as long as you see results)
- Taking them to the library, recommending it as another place to study
- Making sure they know how to use the different resources in the library. This will be helpful when they have to write research papers
- Making sure they understand the difference between doing homework, reviewing homework and studying for exams.

FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR COLLEGE

The unsettling news is that a year at most colleges, especially if living costs are included, starts at about \$9,000 and can exceed \$40,000. The good news is that if you need financial aid to help meet college costs, you are likely to receive it. A school's tuition and the actual cost you will pay after financial aid may be different. Cost should never be a deterrent in choosing the colleges to which you will apply.

There is a staggering amount of federal, state, institutional, and local financial aid available every year. Most of the students who apply for aid and who need it do receive all or part of what they need to attend their first-choice college. And the likelihood of receiving aid becomes greater as the cost of college increases. During the application process, it makes sense to pick colleges with a range of costs, including some that are within your reach financially, but never eliminate the college you really want to attend on grounds of cost alone.

The admission decision and the financial aid decision are made separately and independently of each other, usually in different offices on the campus. The admission decision comes first and it usually makes no difference whether or not you are a candidate for financial aid.

The student and parents are responsible for paying what they can; financial aid is intended to supplement such efforts, not substitute for them.

The kind of financial aid we're discussing is the specified amount of money that is offered to a student to help handle educational expenses. Most financial aid is given because the student has demonstrated need for it, and the amount of that aid is limited to the student's calculated need. The student's need is determined by subtracting the Expected Family Contribution, which is the (EFC), from the Cost of Attendance, which is the (COA).

COA - EFC = STUDENT NEED

The Expected Family Contribution is made up of:

- the amount the student's parents can pay from their income and assets
- the amount the student can contribute from earnings, plus savings account(s)
- any amount that is being contributed as a non-repayable gift from any source

No dollar amount will generate the same Expected Family Contribution because of several factors:

- Age of parents/guardians
- Size of family
- Personal assets
- Medical expenses
- Healthcare for aging parents

Most families fall somewhere in the middle, making too little to worry about financing their teens' educations, but making too much to qualify for a large amount of need-based assistance. Saving money for college is not easy, especially when it may be years down the road. If you are a parent who can save, do so—it's never too early. Here are some ways to save:

- Where you can, cut back on costly items
- Research pre-paid tuition plans in your state. These plans lock in today's tuition rates for tomorrow's education
- Research the 529 Tuition Investment Plan within your state
- If you want to begin exploring your financial aid options and get an early start on the financial aid process, try the FAFSA4caster at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov. By using FAFSA4caster, you will receive an early estimate of eligibility for federal student aid

HEALTHY HABITS

IF YOUR TEENS DO NOT EAT WELL AND GET ENOUGH SLEEP AND EXERCISE, THEY WILL NOT BE PRODUCTIVE IN SCHOOL.

GOOD NUTRITION IS KEY.

As parents, you have some control over what your teens eat at home. Ensure that they:

- Eat breakfast
- Bring lunch to school or encourage them to eat lunch at school
- Drink lots of water
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables in their diet
- Include lean or low-fat choices in their diet
- Limit saturated fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugar

REGULAR EXERCISE IS ESSENTIAL:

- A regular exercise program should incorporate 60 minutes of exercise at least five days a week. (This can include their school exercise program)
- Check with teens' health-care providers before starting an exercise program

GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP:

- Help teens manage their time, which includes making sure they allocate hours for sleep and rest as part of their routine schedule.

MENTORS

MENTORS CAN BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON TEENS AND CAN GIVE THEM ADULTS' SUPPORT. THEY CAN HELP REINFORCE VALUES. MENTORS CAN BE:

- Relatives who live near by or can communicate via email/letters
- Teachers, counselors or school administrators
- Coaches, fellow employees or religious leaders.

They can share information about:

- Work and/or volunteer opportunities
- Careers
- Strategies for school and success
- Life during high school and preparing for college.

GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE IN HIGH SCHOOL

WHILE YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT TEENS' FUTURES, DON'T FORGET TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE PRESENT. THEY ARE NOT THINKING ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL AS PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE, YET. THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT MAKING FRIENDS, FITTING IN AND THE DEMANDS OF THE WORKLOAD.

As parents you should reassure, encourage and support. Together, you and your teens will learn during high school orientations what the requirements are for graduation, what college preparation courses are recommended and how your teens should think about structuring their high school years to prepare for college. The orientations will also provide resources to help your teens succeed. You should schedule individual meetings with high school teachers, counselors, coaches, and other appropriate staff members. Be proactive in the process—teach this lesson to your teens, and it will serve them well in high school, college and beyond.

When helping your teens plan for college while they are in high school, there are several key areas to consider:

COURSES • TESTS • EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES • COMMUNITY SERVICE

SUMMER ENRICHMENT • RECOMMENDATIONS • FINANCIAL AID RESEARCH

COURSES—The courses your teens take in high school and their performance levels are an essential part of college applications and, therefore, should be taken very seriously. If they take four years of English, math, science, social studies, and foreign language, they will be well prepared.

STANDARDIZED TESTS—For admission to college, most institutions will require either the SAT I or ACT. Students may also be required to take the SAT II Subject Tests, and if they speak English as a second language, they will take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). (To prepare for these tests, your teens have the option of taking the PSAT (for SAT) or the PLAN (for ACT)).

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES—As in middle school, encourage your teens to participate in after school activities. They will exercise what they've learned in the classroom in teams, clubs and organizations, giving them the opportunity to be leaders, learn independently and have hands-on experiences. These activities are essential to a well-rounded application.

COMMUNITY SERVICE—Another opportunity to apply classroom skills in the larger community, volunteering not only benefits society, but these activities are essential to well-rounded college and/or scholarship applications.

SUMMER ENRICHMENT—Identify summer opportunities that support your teens' interests or encourage them to try something new, such as community service, internships, work, camps, or spending time on a college campus. During this time, teens should keep journals as a way of collecting experiences to draw from when writing college application essays.

RECOMMENDATIONS—Letters from teachers, counselors and other adults who know your teens well and can characterize your teens' strengths, recommendations are often required by colleges and universities. Recommendations are based on students' achievements, values and personalities—make sure your teens understand that they need to be actively involved in school both in and outside the classroom, as the recommender will need facts to draw from. The more involved the student is, the better the recommendation will be. Allow teachers and counselors plenty of time to write—they are busy helping other students as well.

FINANCIAL RESEARCH—Start researching financial aid in ninth grade and familiarize you teen with requirements and deadlines, so they will be prepared in late high school. Also have him/her begin investigating scholarship opportunities. This will provide them with an incentive to work hard all four years of high school.