

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hornell City School District



January 2015

## To make New Year's resolutions stick, include the details

It's New Year's resolution time again. This year, help your teen make some learning resolutions that will really stick! The more specific her goals are, the more likely your teen is to attain them. So instead of encouraging her to resolve to "do better in school," help her come up with detailed plans that will help her do it.

For example, your teen might resolve to:

- **Ask at least one useful question** in every class each day. In order to ask an informed question, your teen will need to pay attention, both to her teacher and to the questions her classmates are asking. Chances are, that will make her more engaged and confident about the material she's learning. She can also strive to *answer* at least one question in each class.
- **Develop a successful system** for note-taking. The most effective way to takes notes in history may be different than the method that works in chemistry. Encourage her to talk with teachers about the best way to record the information they discuss.
- **Review daily notes every night before bed.** Research shows that the last thing a person reads before going to bed stays embedded in the brain. Your teen can seal in those Spanish vocabulary words and math formulas by reviewing the things she wrote down during the day.

Source: M. Hardcastle, "Do Better in School This Year," [niswc.com/resolve-learn](http://niswc.com/resolve-learn).



## Sharpen your teen's critical thinking

Critical thinking—the ability to analyze, evaluate and apply information to reach a conclusion—is one of the most important skills for school success. To help your teen develop his critical thinking abilities, encourage him to:

- **Explain situations** and examples carefully. He'll build a vocabulary he can use to make arguments and express opinions.
- **See all sides of one issue.** Have your teen think of an issue he's passionate about. Then, ask him to defend an alternate viewpoint with the same dedication.
- **Try "thinking" activities.** For example, working on the school newspaper will teach your teen to conduct interviews and distill information into articles.
- **Embrace other points** of view. Your teen will interact with people with diverse backgrounds and a variety of perspectives for the rest of his life. Appreciating differing viewpoints will help him gain insights and solve problems in the future.

## Study tips improve focus

If your teen can't concentrate on studying, encourage her to:



- **Set** manageable goals for each study session.
- **Stand up** if her mind wanders. A short mental break will help her regain focus.
- **Jot down** reminders of other things she must do, but not stop studying to do them.

Source: "Control of Study Environment," Virginia Tech Division of Student Affairs, [niswc.com/standup](http://niswc.com/standup).

## Disagree without fighting

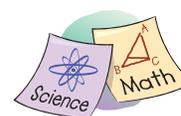
Nearly all teens argue with their parents, but research says that it's the *way* that kids and parents disagree that makes the difference. You don't have to back down when your teen disagrees, but it helps if you can:

- **Listen to his point.** If he is calm and persuasive, acknowledge his delivery.
- **Come to a mutual decision.**

One study found that teens who knew how to listen and make their points politely were 40 percent more likely to say *no* to a friend offering drugs and alcohol.

Source: P. Neighmond, "Why a Teen Who Talks Back May Have a Bright Future," NPR, [niswc.com/disagree](http://niswc.com/disagree).

## Encourage your teen to stick with science and math



College graduates with degrees in STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and math—have more job options. Sadly, many students stop taking these subjects in high school.

Research says parents are influential in keeping teens in these classes. As your teen thinks about what to take next year, help her learn about careers she could pursue if she continues to study math and science.

Source: "Want to Get Teens Interested in Math and Science? Target Their Parents," Association for Psychological Science, [niswc.com/stay-in-stem](http://niswc.com/stay-in-stem).



## What if my senior isn't ready for college?

**Q:** My son is a senior. All his friends are getting excited about college, but he's not sure he even wants to go. He is young for his age and he isn't very responsible. His grades are adequate, but I am very involved with making sure he does his homework. Is it even worth it for him to go to college? What options are there for kids like my son?

**A:** There is no question that college is a good investment. But it isn't *enrolling* in college that pays off. It's *graduating* with a degree. That takes discipline and responsibility. If your son is short on both, you may be right to be thinking about other options. His school counselor can help you and your son sort out what's best for him. Instead of heading directly to a four-year college, your son could:



- **Work for one year** before starting college in a field he's thinking about studying. This may build his enthusiasm for fulfilling the requirements for success in the field.
- **Enroll at a community college.** This will enable him to earn credits while he is figuring out what he wants to study. Later he can transfer to a four-year college.
- **Go to a technical school.** Many good jobs require some training but not a degree.



## Are you teaching your teen citizenship?

Teens who are concerned about other people, their school, their community and their world are more likely to be successful both in school and beyond. Are you raising a good citizen? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** with your teen about current events and ask for her opinions on them?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to take action if she reads about an issue that concerns her? She can write a letter to the editor or volunteer.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you remind** your teen that rights always come with responsibilities?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you expect** your teen to be honest? Honesty is an important part of academic success and citizenship.

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you talk** about making the right choice even if it isn't the most popular thing to do?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching responsible citizenship. For each no, try that idea.*

*“The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as long as we live.”*

*—Mortimer Adler*

## Be a homework resource

You don't have to understand your high schooler's homework to help him get the most out of it. To best support his efforts:

- **Ask trigger questions.** Help your teen connect what he's learning to what he already knows. Ask him to explain the material to you or to draw a diagram.
- **Find resources.** Direct him to books or websites that may help him understand.
- **Stay involved.** Look over textbooks together. Have family discussions about what he's learning. Stay in touch with his teachers for information on his work.

Source: K. Grabarek, "Staying Involved: Approaches to Helping Our Middle and High School Students Learn," Parent Academic Resources, Inc.

## Respect: Show it to get it

Teens want to be respected, but they don't always remember to respect others. To help your teen make respect a habit:



- 1. Be a role model.** Pay your teen the same respect you expect from her.
- 2. Discuss ways** she can show respect, such as by listening and doing her work.
- 3. Teach her** how adults show respect—by looking people in the eye, for example.
- 4. Correct her** quickly, but politely.

Source: W. Sears and M. Sears, *The Successful Child*, Little, Brown.

## Expectations inspire success

Teens strive to meet parents' expectations of them. Make an effort to:

- **Talk to your teen** about what you expect of her in school. Discuss what she hopes to achieve.
- **Agree on attainable goals.**
- **Discuss your teen's future.** Talk about potential college and career plans. Tell her you believe she can succeed.

### Helping Students Learn®

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