



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 can help teens unplug from technology, ease stress and keep their brains 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 will exchange gifts this month, consider giving your teenager a magazine subscription or the first book in a series as gifts.
- 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.

Link learning to real-life situations



One of the best ways to support what students are learning in school is to link classroom concepts to real-life activities.

Talk about the subjects your teen is taking, and then look for practical activities that relate to the concepts. For example, to make a connection with:

- **Math**, ask your teen to help you create a monthly budget for the family. Or, when you go to gas up your car, ask your teen to estimate how much a full, half or quarter tank of gas will cost.
- **History**, visit a local museum, battlefield or monument. Or, if your teen is taking a modern history class, speak to someone who lived through events in that period.
- **A foreign language**, watch a movie or read a children's book in that language together. Or, challenge your teen to translate a favorite poem or quotation.
- **Science**, ask your teen to brainstorm ways your family can help protect and preserve the environment

Offer support as your teenager becomes an independent learner



By high school, students should be in charge of fulfilling school responsibilities. It's not *your* job to tutor your teenager or think of ideas for a long-range project. These are the years when establishing independence is crucial.

You can help best by remaining familiar with the work your teen is doing, and offering support without taking over. Here's how:

- **Ask for details** about the school day. Say things like, "Tell me one thing you learned in your chemistry class today" or "What upcoming assignments do you have this week?"
- **Create a supportive environment.** Offer to bring a snack when your teen is studying. Give your teen a ride to the library or pick up needed

school supplies while you're out shopping.

- **Show that reading** is a high priority. Talk about books, news and magazine articles—anything you have read lately. Share articles you think your teen would find interesting.
- **Set high, yet reasonable,** expectations—and expect your teen to meet them. When teens know their families believe in their abilities, they are more likely to rise to the occasion.

"He who learns but does not think, is lost! He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger."

—Confucius

Community college is a practical option for many undergraduates



According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), community colleges enroll over one-third of all undergraduates in the United States. That's more than six million students!

Students choose community colleges for many reasons, such as:

- **A need to work** and go to school at the same time. Community colleges offer flexible schedules of classes.
- **The cost.** Typically, the cost of tuition and fees at a two-year community college is less than half the cost of a four-year college.
- **A shorter route to employment.** Many jobs do not require a four-year

degree. Programs in many technical occupations offer students a two-year certificate and quick entry into work.

To find out if community college could be a good fit, encourage your teen to schedule a meeting with a college counselor and ask about:

- **The courses** and programs the school offers.
- **The cost** to complete a program that interests your teen. Is financial aid available? Do they have a work-study program?
- **Options for transferring** to a four-year university. Where do most students from the community college enroll after they complete their first two years? What credits would transfer?

Are you helping your teen develop good character?



As children become teenagers, families still play an important role in shaping their character.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are instilling your values in your teen:

- ___ **1. Do you take advantage** of everyday opportunities to talk about the importance of morals and values?
- ___ **2. Do you model the values** you want your teen to develop? If you value compassion, for example, are you kind to others?
- ___ **3. Do you look for ways** to put your values into action—such as by volunteering for a cause important to you or helping out a neighbor?
- ___ **4. Do you offer praise** when you see your teen demonstrating your family's values?
- ___ **5. Do you point out** people you see on the news or around your neighborhood who are practicing strong values?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are instilling a strong moral code in your teen. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Reducing high schoolers' stress boosts attendance and learning



Research has found that teens who experience stressful events at home often have attendance problems and difficulty learning at school for up to two days following the event.

One study found that sources of stress for teens include:

- **Conflict with parents.**
- **Family demands.**
- **Problems with homework.**
- **Time management issues.**

It makes sense: When students are distracted in class because they are stressed about something that happened at home the night before, they can't pay attention—and are less likely to learn.

When your teen is experiencing stress, offer these tips:

- **Take a deep breath.** Taking the time to stop and think about the issue at hand may help your teen see a solution to the problem.
- **Exercise.** Twenty to 30 minutes of exercise can relieve tension and clear your teen's head. Suggest that your teen go on a run or try some stretching.
- **Keep a journal.** Some teens find it easier to write down their feelings than to talk about them. This is a great way to relieve stress—and your teen will be strengthening writing skills at the same time.

Source: J. Warner, "Teen Stress at Home Lingers in School," WebMD Health News.

Q: My high schooler has always been shy. I thought it was a phase but, if anything, it seems to be getting worse. My teen is a good student and a great artist. However, in a group of peers, my teen just freezes up. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Your teen is not alone. In fact, some studies show that most students are shy—at least in some situations.

Experts tell us that shyness doesn't go away. So the way you help your teen deal with it is critical. Focus on the positives. Your teen is probably a great listener and may have good insights into people. Emphasize those strengths—and help your teen develop additional skills that will make life a bit easier.

To help your teen cope:

- **Give reassurance.** Many shy kids think they're the only person in the world who has trouble in social situations. Let your teen know that lots of kids suffer from shyness.
- **Encourage your teen** to share opinions and to be more vocal in family settings.
- **Have your teen practice** looking people in the eye and smiling when they meet.
- **Help your teen prepare** a question or two to ask when meeting someone new.
- **Find ways for your teen** to work with others in small groups. Is there an art club at the school or community center? Could your teen paint the sets for the school play? Learning to use and focus on strengths can help your teen develop more confidence and grow up to be a capable young adult.

Make an effort to connect and spend time with your teenager



Spending time with parents is an essential priority for teens—even if they don't admit it.

Most teens want to have positive relationships with their parents—they just want those relationships to change as they grow older.

To make the most of the time you spend with your teen:

- **Take five ... or 15.** Devote at least five to 15 minutes a day to your teen. Offer your complete attention—and let your teen choose what you do. Your student may want to talk about a problem, watch a video together, or go for a walk. The important thing is that you focus on your teen.
- **Keep advice to a minimum.** Every time you try to solve a

problem for your teen, you send the message that your teen can't solve problems independently. Listen, empathize and express confidence that your teen will make the right decision.

- **Show an interest.** Talking about what your teen is doing at school is a great first step. Attend games and performances. Go to school meetings. Being there demonstrates how important your teen is to you more than your words can.
- **Be friendly.** Make an effort to get to know your teen's friends. Offer to drive a group of them to the movies or another activity. Make your home a place where they can feel comfortable "hanging out." You'll know your teen is in a safe place and you will get to know friends better.

It Matters: Discipline

Structure and discipline help students thrive



Most high schoolers have matured a lot since their elementary school days, but they still have a long way to go.

The part of teens' brains that controls impulses and helps them make good decisions is not mature yet. That's one of the many reasons teens need structure and discipline.

Your efforts to discipline and guide your teen will pay off in all settings—especially at home and at school.

Remember to:

- **Expect difficult moments.** When your teen acts first and thinks later, blurts out the wrong thing or is moody, it's not necessarily to hurt your feelings. Try not to take these things personally.
- **Be firm, yet flexible.** Make sure your teen knows the limits and the consequences for violating them. Consider granting more freedom as your teen shows more responsibility.
- **Know your teen's plans.** What will your teen be doing? Who will your teen be with? When will your teen be home?
- **Distinguish** between an *explanation* and an *excuse*. Your teen's age and brain growth may explain some behavior. But they are never an excuse for being rude or defiant.
- **Focus on big issues.** These include things like schoolwork, safety and respect for others. Try not to nag your teen about the smaller issues, such as the occasional messy room.

Source: D. Walsh, Ph.D., *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, Atria Books.

Teens' behavior is influenced by friends, social media and TV

Even though you have a big impact on your teen's life, you aren't the only one influencing your student's behavior and attitude about important things, such as school.

Make sure you are paying attention to outside influences that affect your teen, such as:

- **Friends.** Try to get to know your teen's friends and their families. Allow your teen to invite friends over occasionally. Talk about what your teen and friends do for fun. Are these friends planning to go to college? If not, what are their plans for after high school?
- **Social media.** Ask about the social media sites your teen belongs to—Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok, etc. Together, look at some of the things your teen and friends post online. Are the photos, comments and videos appropriate? Do they reflect your teen's values?



- **Television.** What shows does your teen like to watch and why? Watch some together, and use them as a starting point for a conversation. Do the characters make good decisions?

Effective consequences are natural, related and reasonable



Consequences are an important part of discipline. They show your teen that actions lead to results.

Experts agree that consequences are most effective when they are:

- **Natural.** The best consequences happen naturally. Example: Your teen doesn't complete an assignment. Natural consequence: Your student earns a bad grade. However, if a natural consequence threatens safety, don't let it happen.
- **Related.** The consequence should relate directly to what your teen did. Example: Your teen comes home with an empty gas tank—again. The rule is to fill the tank before returning the car. Related consequence: Your teen can't use the car for one week.
- **Reasonable.** Example: Your teenager comes home after curfew without permission from you. Reasonable consequence: Your teen has to stay home next Saturday night.