

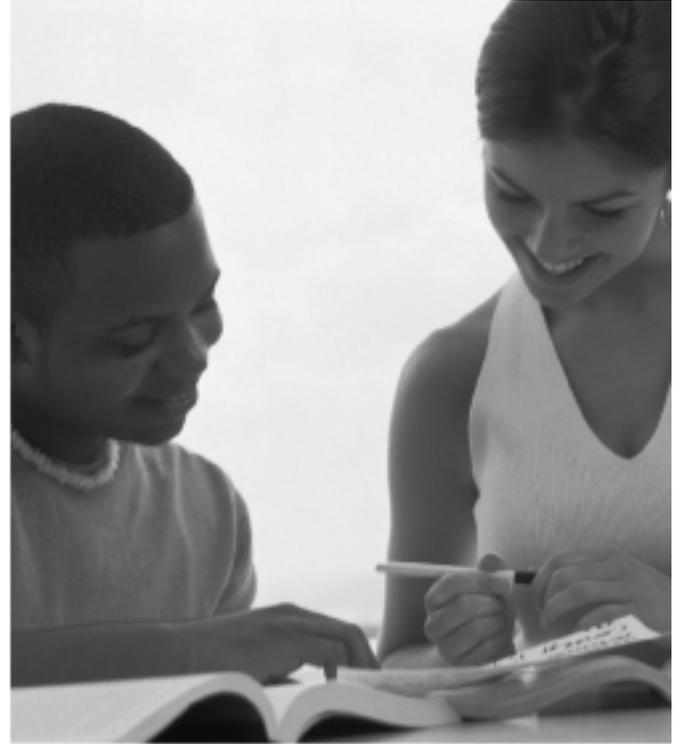
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Almost a third of your child's life is spent in school. Other than family, school is the most important influence on your child's life. And one of the most powerful impacts on teens' school performance is the connection they feel to their school. Feeling connected means that students have a sense of belonging and feel close to people, including teachers. Attachment to school is associated with reduced alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use, lower rates of sexual activity, fewer thoughts about or attempts at suicide, and lower levels of violent behavior.

## Parents make a difference!

Research shows children do better in school and have more positive attitudes about it when their parents are involved in school life. Many parents become less involved with school activities as their children move on to high school, yet teenagers benefit when their parents show interest. There are many ways for you to get involved.

- **Communicate.** Keep in touch with your teen's teachers and other school staff such as principals or counselors. Knowing teachers' names and subject areas is an important first step. Make the family-teacher connection early in the school year, before any problems arise. Take advantage of school open houses or parent-teacher conferences. Ask teachers specific questions about curriculum, their expectations of students, what you can do to support both the teacher and your child, and the opportunities you will have for future communication. Ask if your school uses email or voicemail to communicate with parents. Build a partnership with teachers so your teen sees you working with teachers, not against them.
- **Student activities.** Students become connected and committed to school by taking part in extracurricular activities and sports. Many young



people find they have talents in areas outside of the classroom and need support to develop them. Encourage your child to join school activities. Ask your teen's teachers to encourage involvement. If your teen is already involved, show your support by attending school events.

- **Expect success.** When parents set high expectations for their children's school performances, teens are more likely to meet those expectations. When teens work toward their "personal best" (this does not mean perfection) in school, they are less likely to become depressed or involved in harmful violent, sexual, or drug-related behaviors. Teens whose parents expect them to make school a priority are much more likely to do well in school. Students whose parents expect them to attend college are more likely to do so.

- **Volunteer in the school.** Schools need chaperones for field trips and other outings or tutors for students who need extra help. Parents can assist at school sporting events and other activities or become a resource for career classes talking to students about their jobs. Parents can also join committees for special projects, help select educational materials or assist in budget matters. Other opportunities exist in parent groups like PTA/PTO or as music or athletic boosters. But before volunteering, ask your teen how this would make him or her feel. Don't be surprised if your teen is not too excited about the idea.
- **Involve both parents.** Research shows that youth do better when both parents, if possible, are involved. In fact, young people are more likely to earn "A's," participate in extracurricular activities, and enjoy school if their fathers participate in their school life.
- **Encourage involvement in leadership opportunities.** Many schools offer programs for older students to serve as tutors or mentors to younger children. Being a "big buddy" to an elementary student may help a teen feel valued.
- Establish quiet time every night for studying, reading, or writing. Keep the time period consistent (for example from 7 to 8 p.m.). Have everyone in your family participate to show the value you place on lifelong learning.
- Be especially supportive of your teen during transitional times, like when entering middle/junior or senior high school. Visit the school with your teen and meet with teachers.
- Talk with your teen about school and his classes and monitor his school attendance.
- Keep a calendar that lists school events, projects, and activities as well as dates of family events.
- Use TV wisely. Limit teens' viewing and monitor video game and computer use.
- Know how and where your kids spend free time (especially after school). Encourage your teen to be involved in productive activities when not in school, rather than "hanging out."

## Where you can go for more information:

**Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension**  
[www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/](http://www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/)

**Partnering for School Success – University of Minnesota Extension**  
[www.extension.umn.edu/parenteducation/schoolsuccess.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/parenteducation/schoolsuccess.html)

**Check & Connect School Engagement Program**  
<http://checkandconnect.org/>

**National Dropout Prevention Centers**  
[www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

**National Education Association – Parent Resources**  
[www.nea.org/parents/](http://www.nea.org/parents/)

**National PTA**  
[www.pta.org/](http://www.pta.org/)

### You may also want to look at:

Bempechat, J. (2000). *Getting our kids back on track: Educating children for the future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## What parents can do

- Set high expectations for school success. Help your teen set reasonable goals and work toward them. Tell teens that you believe in their abilities and that is why you expect success.
- Recognize your teen's academic accomplishments. Don't assume that because your teen is maturing, he or she doesn't need or want attention from you. Sometimes, teens are pressured not to excel by peers, or to "just get by." You can offset negative expectations with positive recognition.
- Create a positive home environment that encourages learning. Keep learning resources handy. These can be as simple as a dictionary and educational books from the library, and as elaborate as a computer with an encyclopedia software program. If possible, designate a comfortable, well-lit study place.

*Adapted with permission from Positive Parenting of Teens, "Teens and School Success" (University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1999, no longer in print).*