

High School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative

still make the difference!



Peer pressure in teen years builds important social skills

When most parents think of peer pressure, they picture their babies cornered at parties, being offered drugs or alcohol. But that isn't always the case. There's positive peer pressure as well—such as when your teen's friends encourage her to join the soccer team or help mow the lawn for an elderly neighbor.

New research shows that both types of peer pressure—positive and negative—are beneficial to children's social development. Peer pressure teaches teens how to gauge other people's feelings and expectations—and how to weigh those against their own wants and needs.

The study isn't suggesting that teens should always give in to peer pressure. It found that teens who felt both negative and positive peer pressure—and occasionally gave in when

the risks were low—were more socially successful as adults. They learned how to read other people and how to accommodate others, which are important components in adult relationships.

On the other hand, teens who always avoided peer pressure turned out to be less engaged socially. Those who didn't care what anyone thought of them became more aloof, disconnected adults, and were less adept at being considerate of people's feelings.

Encourage your teen to stick to her beliefs and values. But remind her to mind the balance between being able to stand up to a friend and still preserving the friendship.

Source: Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, "Teens Who Feel More Peer Pressure Turn Out Better, Not Worse," *NurtureShock: Newsweek*, <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/nurtureshock/archive/2009/08/22/teens-who-feel-more-peer-pressure-turn-out-better-not-worse.aspx>.

Teach your teen how to handle stress



The stress of everyday life—school, friends, family, jobs, extracurricular activities, etc.—can really

take a toll on your teen's health. Stress has been linked to weight gain, headaches, mood swings, poor grades and sleep problems. To keep your teen's stress from overwhelming him, encourage him to:

- **Calm down.** If he's feeling stressed, he should stop what he's doing and take a few deep breaths. Squeezing a stress ball can help alleviate tension.
- **Vent.** Your teen could write in a journal or talk to you about what's going on.
- **Take a break.** If math homework is stressing him out, work on history for a while. He could listen to music for a while—or go for a jog to clear his head.
- **Avoid procrastination.** Planning ahead always helps. Have your teen talk to his teacher if he's having trouble completing a project on time.

Source: "Advice from Teens: 10 Ways to De-Stress Your Life," *TeenHealthFX*, www.teenhealthfx.com/answers/teenTips/tip_3.php.

Tame your nerves when it comes to tough talks with your teen



Teens face difficult issues every day—from sex and dating concerns, to drugs and violence. You aren't helping your teen

if you cover your ears every time she asks you a tough question.

Be prepared to have an open conversation with your teen to discuss these issues. It's better for you to share your family's values with your teen than for her to go along with whatever her friends are doing.

Here are some tips for surviving tough talks with your teen:

- **Do some thinking in advance.** It's natural that your teen will eventually come to you to talk about a difficult issue. Spend time thinking of typical teen behaviors and how you would advise your teen to address them.
- **Avoid delaying the conversation.** Your teen will likely catch you off guard with her question. But realize that if she's asking your advice on a situation, she has probably already asked her friends for their

advice. You'll have to answer the question right away. Buy yourself some time to think by saying something like "I'm glad you came to me with that question."

- **Be clear and honest** in your response. Discuss your family's values. Use proper terminology for things rather than slang. If you're embarrassed, say so. Your teen will be more likely to turn to you in the future if she knows you'll give honest advice without being judgmental.

Source: "Tough Talks with your Teen," *Shoulder to Shoulder: Raising Teens Together*, www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Tough_Talks_your/.

"You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives."

—Clay P. Bedford

Should your teen disclose a learning disability to colleges?



Your teen has a learning disability. Should he tell colleges when he applies? Doing so could help the college see that he has

been able to overcome problems. But some teens are afraid that a learning disability might keep them out of the college they want.

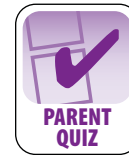
The New York Times asked admissions directors this question. Their advice: Don't hide your disability. "We favor honesty in the admissions process," says Steven Syverson of

Lawrence University. Knowing about the disability can help the college see how your teen handles challenges. That will help them see that he will be able to do college-level work.

Before your teen enrolls, the college needs to know about his disability. He needs to ask about the support the college provides. Otherwise, he may struggle because he didn't get the help he needed.

Source: "Q and A: College Admissions," *New York Times*, October 8, 2009, <http://questions.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/17/qa-college-admissions/#disabilities>.

Do you and your teen speak the same language?



Sometimes, it seems as if teens and parents don't speak the same language. They say they'll be home "soon." They mean,

"Sometime before tomorrow." You say, "Do your homework now." They hear, "Do it whenever."

Are you making every effort to speak the same language as your teen? Answer each question *yes* or *no* to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you spend time** with your teen every day so you can talk about day-to-day issues?
- ___ **2. Do you schedule times** to do something special together? You can go out for breakfast or take a walk.
- ___ **3. Do you spend a few minutes** with your teen before bed? Often, teens will say things in the dark that they would never say during the day.
- ___ **4. Do you occasionally watch TV** shows with your teen?
- ___ **5. Do you try to listen** to at least some of your teen's favorite music?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are trying to speak the same language as your teen. For each *no*, try that idea.

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Encourage your high schooler to practice 'real' writing at home



Teens used to spend hours talking on the phone to one another. Now they're texting, emailing and instant messaging with friends. The sound of keystrokes has taken over the sound of voices—and by the amount of typing you hear coming from your family computer, your teen could be writing the next *War and Peace*.

Written communication has clearly come back into fashion—with a speedier response time than the days of letter writing. Yet with teens' missives often resembling half-completed crossword puzzles (idk wut 2 do), many parents worry that this revolution in communication is occurring at the expense of teens' writing skills.

However, a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project

has found that that is not the case. Surprisingly, many teens don't even think of these activities as "writing" at all—they consider it communication, like a phone call or quick "hi" in passing. So how do their "real" writing skills stack up?

All teens spend time doing "real" writing at school—and 93% surveyed stated that they write for fun outside of school. A whopping 86% of teens agree with parents that good writing skills are important for success in life.

So continue talking about the importance of writing with your teen—and encourage her to pen a short story or keep a journal to exercise those *real* writing skills!

Source: Amanda Lenhart, Aaron Smith, Alexandra Rankin Macgill and Sousan Arafeh, "Writing, Technology and Teens," The Pew Internet & American Life Project, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/808/writing-technology-and-teens>.

Q: My teen was always an above-average student. But now in her tenth grade year, her grades have dropped. She has a new group of friends—people I don't know and don't really like. She's lost interest in school, and in other activities like sports that she used to enjoy. Recently, I've caught her lying about things—from a grade on a test to where she's going. I am worried she might be using drugs. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Any one of the changes in your teen's behavior might be a cause for worry. But taken together, they point in a dangerous direction.

Your teen is at risk of using drugs. You need to be open to that possibility, and you need to start thinking about what you'll do if you learn it's the truth.

First, try to talk with her teachers. They may be seeing the same things. They may even have some added insights. Tell them about your worries. Ask them to stay in touch with you.

Learn all you can about drug abuse. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (www.nida.nih.gov) has accurate information for parents.

You're going to have to talk with your teen. Tell her what you have seen. Tell her what you suspect. Then be sure your teen gets outside help. Your family doctor may offer some ideas on where to get help.

Trust your instincts. If you suspect your teen is using drugs, you're probably right. Delaying action won't help, so act as quickly as you can.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

Show your teenager how to be financially self-disciplined



It's already spring—just about time for your teen to begin looking for a summer job. Before he gets that first paycheck and hits the mall, teach him about financial self-discipline.

Here's how:

1. **Ask your teen** why he wants the job. Is it to help out your family? Is he saving for college? Does he just want some extra spending money?
2. **Talk about how your teen** handles money now. Does he have a savings account? Or does he spend money as soon as he gets it?
3. **Help your teen** come up with a savings goal. Discuss what he would like to save money for, and

how much he thinks he could save by September.

4. **Work out a budget** with your teen. It would be great if your teen could put every penny he earns toward savings—but it's not likely. Even the most disciplined teen may need some money for an emergency bike repair.
5. **Encourage your teen** to stick to his budget. Share some of your money-saving tips with him—like using coupons from the Sunday newspaper or waiting to buy something until it goes on sale. Helping your teen learn how to handle money responsibly now will benefit him greatly in the future.

It Matters: Reading

Does your teen know the purpose for reading?



Every time your teen reads, she's reading for a purpose. When she reads the sports page, her purpose is to see who won. If she is reading a mystery, her purpose is entertainment.

Sometimes people read for information. Want to know how many calories are in the cereal? Read the box. Want to learn how to program the DVD player? Read the instruction manual.

Knowing the purpose for reading actually helps readers decide *how* to read. For example:

- **To find the calories** in the cereal, your teen won't have to read the entire box. She'll just look quickly until she finds the nutrition label.
- **To program the DVD player**, your teen doesn't have to read the whole instruction manual. She can skip the part about how to set the time and move right on to the section she needs.

Setting a purpose for reading is also helpful when your teen reads school assignments. For example, if your teen is reading:

- **A novel for English**, she needs to start on page one and read completely through to the end.
- **A chapter in science**, she needs to skim quickly for key points. Then read more carefully to learn the major ideas.

Teens (and adults) are better readers when they know their purpose for reading!

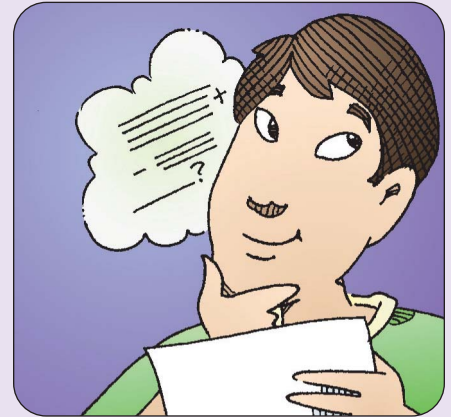
Source: Shelly O'Hara, *Improving Your Study Skills*, ISBN: 9780-7645-7803-8 (John Wiley & Sons, www.wiley.com).

Teach your high schooler *how* to read a word problem in math

Even teens who are good at math can have trouble solving word problems. In one study, even though 95 percent of students could read all the words in a word problem, fewer than four in ten knew what they had to do to solve the problem.

That's because you don't read a math problem the same way you read a short story or even a history textbook. Here's a five-step process your teen can use when reading a word problem so he'll know how to solve it. Have your teen:

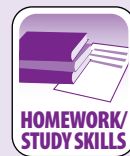
1. **Survey.** Read the problem. Then read it aloud and create a mental picture of the problem. Or, draw a picture.
2. **Identify the question** the problem asks you to answer. Usually, this comes at the end of the word problem. ("When will the two trains meet?")



3. **Figure out what math process** should be used to solve the problem (addition, subtraction, division).
4. **Read.** Read the problem aloud again.
5. **Compute.** Do the computation to answer the problem.

Source: Betty D. Roe, Barbara D. Stoodt, Paul C. Burns, *Secondary School Literacy Instruction: The Content Areas*, ISBN: 0-618-04293-8 (Houghton Mifflin, www.hmco.com).

Help your teen look for and understand key ideas in text



When your teen is reading assignments, have him use a four-step process that will help him look for and understand key ideas:

1. **Preview.** Look over the assignment. Identify key ideas. Look at pictures. Read chapter headings and words in bold type.
2. **Ask questions.** Write questions he thinks may be answered. Turn to the end of the chapter and look for review questions.

3. **Read.** Now read the assignment carefully. As he finds answers to questions, he can check them off his list. If he has not found answers to all his questions, go back to reread.
4. **Summarize.** Restate, in his own words, what he has just read. If he can, he is finished. If he can't, he needs to go back through each of the steps again.

Source: Rona Flippo, *Texts and Tests: Teaching Study Skills Across Content Areas*, ISBN: 0-325-00491-9 (Heinemann, www.heinemann.com).