

insights

Helping teenagers achieve sustained school success!

by Sharon Witt



The secondary school year is well and truly underway and thousands of teenagers (and their parents) across the country are settling in for a full year ahead. For some this marks the beginning of an entirely new stage in their schooling, while others are buckling in for another year of academic rigor. The following are a few tips to help you and your young person navigate the year ahead.

1. Communicate with school

Communication with the school is important in aiding a successful school year for your teenager. Familiarise yourself with the names of your child's subject teachers, year level coordinator and pastoral care/homeroom teacher. If your child has any specific learning or behavioral issues it is important to share these with their teachers at the outset. Don't assume that information will be passed on from previous teachers.

Be sure to communicate early any concerns you have regarding your teen's experience at school. As a secondary teacher myself, I can't stress enough the importance of parents letting us know of issues before they become big problems. We can only deal with information you share with us.

It can be annoying wading through the mountain of communication that arrives home via your teen's schoolbag or your inbox, however it is important that you read such communication. Have a dedicated place for keeping incoming and outgoing forms. Note important term dates, sports days, excursions and camps in your diary and on a family calendar visible to all.

2. Organisation tools to support success

We like to believe our teenager will naturally develop strong organisational skills and be a self-motivated young person. However this is not often the case. As parents we often need to model organisation tools and strategies.

Ensure your child uses his or her school diary on a daily basis to record homework, assessment tasks and tests. Take a look at it regularly and ask questions if there are weeks of blank pages.

3. Create and support a homework plan

Many teenagers find homework an inconvenience. However, if homework is set for your teenager it is better to set them up for success rather than ignore the issue. Ensure your child has a well-lit space where they can complete homework each night, ensuring they also have the tools they need. Ensure their social media devices are somewhere else and keep healthy snacks at the ready. Encourage your teenager to get into the habit of creating a 'to do' list to keep them focused on two or three tasks in a session.

4. Encourage your teen to find their spark

The school year is long and can be exhausting at times, and it is *not* the be-all and end-all. Encourage your teenager to find their spark by being involved in non-academic activities that bring them joy. Examples are sports, music, dance, art or anything else they have a passion for. Having an interest outside of school that encourages socialising and developing friendships is also great for resilience.



5. Prepare for a successful day ahead

Preparing for a successful day starts with getting plenty of sleep. This is becoming increasingly difficult as an unprecedented number of teenagers are reporting sleep issues as a concern. Most teenagers require 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, but many report getting less than 5.

Young people often lack the self-control to avoid engaging online when they should be sleeping. One strategy for improving this situation, which may require you to develop your 'digital spine', is removing internet-enabled devices from the bedroom. Insist devices are placed in a central charging area in the home, away from bedrooms, at a nominated time each evening. Many teenagers also benefit from developing a pre-sleep routine such as reading a (paper) book or magazine half an hour before bed, having a warm bath or shower and/or a warm milk drink. If sleep continues to be an issue, it would be worth a visit to your local GP for a consultation to rule out any underlying issues.

The best way to set the scene for a successful day ahead is to ensure your teenager eats a healthy breakfast and takes a nutritious and balanced lunch with plenty of healthy snacks to keep their brain focused throughout the day.

6. Make time to chat about school

Finally, keep the lines of communication open with your teenager about their school experiences. While you may be met with an awkward grunt when you ask about their day at school, don't give up on asking. Often a teenager will chat more in the car or in a café. Keep reminding your child that you are always available to listen – listening being the crucial point here. Many adolescents don't want you to fix their concerns but they may need you to just listen.



Talk about the positive experiences you had during your own high school years and reassure your teen that it will go by quicker than they can imagine.



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