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Encourage Organization

PARENT TIP #13

Establishing Good Routines for My Teen

by Susan J. Demas

Is your family calendar jam-packed? Does a typical day include soccer practice, jazz band, a teleconference with the corporate office, babysitting and picking up your youngest from daycare? Maybe that's a slow day. Or maybe your brood is too busy keep a calendar.

Consider investing in one and hanging it in the kitchen for everyone to see and use. If you want your teen to establish a good routine, it helps to lead by example. And it will probably make everybody's life a little bit easier – especially yours.

As kids get older, they feel the tug of independence. They want to do what they want – which often means hanging out with friends, using the car or watching TV until midnight. But teens need rules and they need a solid schedule to be successful, one that balances academics, family, friends, activities and work. It's part of being that well-rounded kid college recruiters are always talking about.

Start by investing in a good organizer for your teen, so she can take responsibility for her daily routine. Encourage her to write down everything from her Algebra II homework to her work schedule at the mall to going over to her best friend's house after school. To be successful, teens need to keep track of everything going on in their lives, not just their assignment to read *War and Peace*.

This will help you and your teen evaluate her routine. Does she spend too much working? Does she have more homework in History than any other subject? Do you always have family dinner at 5:30 sharp? What are weekends like? Now you can launch a plan of attack.

It's a Fact.

Being a teen means keeping a lot of balls up in the air. A good routine is the best way to keep up a successful juggling act.

A Good-Routine Quiz

1. Does your teen have an organizer? **YES/NO**
2. Does your child get all of her homework done? **YES/NO**
3. Does your child seem tired all the time? **YES/NO**
4. Do your teen's activities, work schedule and social life regularly get in the way of school and homework? **YES/NO**
5. Is your teen frustrated that he knows the material but isn't performing well on tests?

If you answered **NO** to 1-3 or **YES** to 4-5, you need to rethink your teen's routine. She needs a system that works better for her.

It often becomes clear that teens are overscheduled. Tough choices need to be made. It's hard telling your child who's been singing and running around the house before her first birthday that she has to choose between the two to maintain her 3.6 GPA. But your teen will learn a valuable lesson in prioritization. This can help your teen focus on what's the most important to her.

Routines are balancing acts. You want your child to have fun, but she still has to get her homework done. Going on dates and being with friends is part of high school. But your teen has to know that school always comes first. If it doesn't, there have to be consequences.

Sometimes there isn't homework that night, although that's unlikely in high school. If that's the case, have your teen review notes, read ahead and get a jump start on future homework during her established study time. That will keep the routine going and help her stay afloat when a flood of assignments come in at the end of the semester.

Always keep your child's unique needs in mind. Maybe your oldest child needs a strict schedule to tackle homework from 6 to 9 p.m. like clockwork. Maybe your middle child is more of a self-starter and is able to budget her own time, whether it's a solid six hours of studying before midterms or fitting in Biology homework in between lacrosse practice.

Be flexible. If your teen is uncomfortable with her routine, it's not going to work. And don't be afraid to have her change it up when you can see it's failing.

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at home: You want your teen to take responsibility for her own schedule and stay on top of things. Here are some ways to sneak in lessons about organization at home.

Clean your room. Her room is her castle and it's her responsibility to care for it. Teens spend a lot of time here doing homework (and sometimes hiding from you) so it's important that it's not a pigsty.

Make dinner. Have your teen help out in the kitchen, which teaches pre-planning, sorting, managing time and following directions. Teens might take pride in cooking an entire meal for the family.

Go to the grocery store. When she has her driver's license, she can help out by picking up a few items at the store. It's a great lesson that with privilege comes responsibility. Have her add to a grocery list on the refrigerator if she's finished an item.

Do the laundry. Talk about a chore that teaches organization! Teach your teen how to sort the laundry, have him read the directions on the label for how much detergent to use, and suggest wash cycles to him for each type of clothing.

Plan a vacation. Enlist your teen to help with the packing list and itinerary. She'll take pride in helping map out where to go and will definitely have a better time. Ask her to plan when she will do the laundry she wants to take with her, when she needs to pack and to help her younger siblings.

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