

Parents... Are you prepared for High School?

Written by Erin E. Harrel, Ph.D.



We spend an inordinate amount of time getting our teens ready for high school: new clothes, shoes, school supplies, making sure they completed summer assignments, attending open houses, parent meetings, completing Individualized Education Plans, and on and on... *Parents are you preparing yourself?*

There is no doubt the jump from Middle School to High School may be one of the biggest transitions students face. It is during these years that they learn critical skills to be successful in life. There is lots of talk about millennials being entitled and/or spoiled, but the reality is kids haven't changed that drastically. Society has changed its expectations of teenagers. Parents have changed the way they parent- some

for the better and some not so much! Taking time to prepare yourself for the next four years and to understand the transitions that need to take place may be the most significant and meaningful thing you can do for your child and yourself.

The transition for kids is both exciting and awkward as they learn to navigate new teachers, friends and peer pressures. You can expect that the first month will be hectic with lots of ups and downs. Many times students are overwhelmed by the new freedoms, friends or lack thereof that occur during the first week. Keeping routines at home as simple and calm as possible can help them through the transition. This is also a good time for parents to start shifting how they relate to their new high schooler. It is during the first year that you will establish your expectations for their performance and behavior for the next four years.

If you make excuses for their poor performance and attribute it to bad teachers, change of routine, the new school, etc; you can expect them to continue to emulate those behaviors. Teaching your teen to adjust to difficult situations is probably one of the best skills you can give them. Life isn't always easy. When you make excuses for your child, you're teaching them that they don't have to face adversity. As parents, it's only natural to want to fix everything for them. In the younger years, it's necessary for parents to be their child's strongest advocate and their voice. As they transition into high school, it's important that they learn to start advocating for themselves. Talking them through how you handle a situation with a bad boss or a difficult friend may help them learn coping mechanisms for dealing with teachers or administrators they are not fond of.

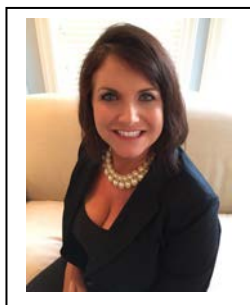
Storming into the school office and demanding your child be changed from a class because they don't like a teacher not only is the start of four years of helicopter parenting, but often times yields undo embarrassment for your child. Teach them to advocate for themselves. Inspire them to have a conversation with the teacher about why they are struggling. Have them ask the teacher for advice on how they can do better or what they can do to change their behavior. A conversation of this nature may solve the problem and empowers your teen. If the struggles continue and they are legitimate, encourage them to find out the process for changing a course. Let them find the guidance office and set up an

appointment. The reward students feel when they are able to solve their own problems leads to future success.

Your role should begin to transition from that of a parent to that of a coach and mentor. In high school, teens should start taking a more active role in the decision making process. This may seem like a simple and easy feat, but may prove more challenging for those parents that have been actively engaged in setting high expectations for their child. The shift to include your child in tough decisions means that you have to let them learn from their own mistakes. This is a critical step in their growth and maturity process. Let's take a few top issues you may face during high school: curfew, driving or driving in the car with friends, attending parties, drinking and even drugs. The most important thing you can do for your child is to keep the lines of communication open. Start engaging them in challenging conversations. Sometimes even healthy debates can lead to positive outcomes and growth for you and your aspiring adult! For example, establishing a curfew may or may not be necessary. If you find that a curfew is important for the health and safety of your teen, let them help you establish the time and when it needs to be imposed. Give them time to come up with their side of the debate. A few quick disclaimers... never let your child use the old adage everyone else is doing it. Make them research to determine if the county or city imposes curfew. Have them come up with valid reasons why they should or should not have a curfew. As their coach, it's your job to steer them toward the outcome that's going to be most beneficial for them in the long run. For example, if they are out until 10 or 11 during the week and then can't get out of bed, there is a problem with their curfew. Discuss this with them rather than just imposing an earlier curfew.

Teens are subjected to an inordinate amount of peer pressure. Talk about these pressures openly. Don't be the parent that says my kid will never... they may! Give them tools and strategies to cope with peer pressure. Establish a code word that they can text you when they need to escape peer pressure. When they text you this word, you need to be prepared to text back with a family emergency or valid reason they need to come home. They can then delete their text to you and show their friends that they have to leave. It's imperative that when your teen uses your family code word that they are not penalized for using it.

Lastly, set high expectations with your teenage and demand they meet them. Build their self-esteem by taking every opportunity to commend their successes. Don't get caught giving in when you know you should stand your ground. Their brains don't fully develop until the age of 25-30. Their thinking is irrational don't let that influence yours. Be a strong mentor and role model and stay engaged in their lives even when they are trying to pull away. That's when they need you most! Lastly, they are listening and watching you even when you think they are not hearing a word you are saying. Be prepared to say the same thing over and over... they eventually get it! If you feel like you're losing your mind on most good days, you're probably doing a good job! Parenting teens is not for the faint of heart! It's the most important job you will ever have... make it your first priority to be the best parent you can be. Your kids and you deserve only the best!



Dr. Erin Harrel is the mother of three active teenagers and founder of AskAMom.net. She has been in education for more than 20 years and has published more than 80 articles on parenting and education. Follow Ask A Mom on social media: Twitter @askamom Facebook @askamom2 Instagram askamom. Be sure to check out the Blog on Askamom.net!