Five ways to keep your teen reading over winter break

Students will soon be on a break from school, but it’s important that they stay in the habit of reading. Regular reading can help teens unplug from technology, ease stress and keep their brains sharp.

Here are a few simple ways to incorporate reading during your teen’s time off:

1. Bring books on trips. If your family will be traveling, make sure your teen brings some reading material and perhaps an audiobook. It will help beat the boredom along the way—and keep reading skills sharp at the same time.

2. Get cooking. Whether you’re preparing a holiday meal or just baking cookies, ask for help. Your teen can read and follow recipe directions—and practice math skills when measuring out ingredients.

3. Take a trip to the local library together. Suggest your teen check out and read a book for pleasure. Ask the librarian to suggest a few popular titles.

4. Give the gift of reading. If your will exchange gifts this month, consider giving your teenager a magazine subscription or the first book in a series as gifts.

5. Encourage reading aloud. Your teen could read a book to a younger sibling or an older relative who can’t see well. You can ask your teen to read you a few interesting articles while you cook or clean up. Or, check out several copies of a play and have a family readers’ theater night.

Offer support as your teenager becomes an independent learner

By high school, students should be in charge of fulfilling school responsibilities. It’s not your job to tutor your teenager or think of ideas for a long-range project. These are the years when establishing independence is crucial.

You can help best by remaining familiar with the work your teen is doing, and offering support without taking over. Here’s how:

- Ask for details about the school day. Say things like, “Tell me one thing you learned in your chemistry class today” or “What upcoming assignments do you have this week?”
- Create a supportive environment. Offer to bring a snack when your teen is studying. Give your teen a ride to the library or pick up needed school supplies while you’re out shopping.
- Show that reading is a high priority. Talk about books, news and magazine articles—anything you have read lately. Share articles you think your teen would find interesting.
- Set high, yet reasonable, expectations—and expect your teen to meet them. When teens know their families believe in their abilities, they are more likely to rise to the occasion.

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Reducing high schoolers’ stress boosts attendance and learning

Research has found that teens who experience stressful events at home often have attendance problems and difficulty learning at school for up to two days following the event.

One study found that sources of stress for teens include:
- Conflict with parents.
- Family demands.
- Problems with homework.
- Time management issues.

It makes sense: When students are distracted in class because they are stressed about something that happened at home the night before, they can’t pay attention—and are less likely to learn.

When your teen is experiencing stress, offer these tips:
- Take a deep breath. Taking the time to stop and think about the issue at hand may help your teen see a solution to the problem.
- Exercise. Twenty to 30 minutes of exercise can relieve tension and clear your teen’s head. Suggest that your teen go on a run or try some stretching.
- Keep a journal. Some teens find it easier to write down their feelings than to talk about them. This is a great way to relieve stress—and your teen will be strengthening writing skills at the same time.


Have a wonderful Winter Break!

Structure and discipline help students thrive

Most high schoolers have matured a lot since their elementary school days, but they still have a long way to go. The part of teens’ brains that controls impulses and helps them make good decisions is not mature yet. That’s one of the many reasons teens need structure and discipline.

Your efforts to discipline and guide your teen will pay off in all settings—especially at home and at school. Remember to:
- Expect difficult moments. When your teen acts first and thinks later, blurts out the wrong thing or is moody, it’s not necessarily to hurt your feelings. Try not to take these things personally.
- Be firm, yet flexible. Make sure your teen knows the limits and the consequences for violating them. Consider granting more freedom as your teen shows more responsibility.
- Know your teen’s plans. What will your teen be doing? Who will your teen be with? When will your teen be home?
- Distinguish between an explanation and an excuse. Your teen’s age and brain growth may explain some behavior. But they are never an excuse for being rude or defiant.
- Focus on big issues. These include things like schoolwork, safety and respect for others. Try not to nag your teen about the smaller issues, such as the occasional messy room.