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Dear Parents,

Just when you are thinking it can't possibly be any more difficult to navigate than the middle school years, here come the high school years. All kidding aside, it isn't all bad—great milestone moments lie ahead! The key to these years is allowing those moments to shine through and to be consistently present for your teen.

It is easy to overlook small moments of success and triumph when being surrounded by so many obligations that come with the high school years, whether it is academics, sports, fundraising, other extracurriculars, after-school jobs, your own career, other siblings—the list goes on and on! These next four years are when your child (who isn't really a child anymore) is truly preparing for adulthood and building their own foundation for what is to come.

This is a time of independence, and your high schooler will surely be testing boundaries. However, they still need you! And it remains important to be involved in your teen's education. Help them find their own path. Help guide them toward smart decisions. Help them grow and flourish in their own way.

During these high school years, your involvement in their lives will look much different from how it was in the elementary school years, and even from the middle school years. But these years are critical. Your teen will make mistakes, no doubt, and it is okay for that to happen—it is all part of the learning process. Your involvement in your high schooler's life lets them know that they can come to you for guidance as they work on making their own way in the world. Connecting with your teen through school-based activities is one way to stay engaged with them as they continue to forge their own path.

This parent guide will not burden you with tasks and to-do lists; rather, it will empower you with useful tools, meaningful advice, and resourceful activities to help you create opportunities for connecting with your high schooler. Schools want parent engagement, not because they want to add to your already hectic schedule, but because studies have shown that students are more successful when there is a strong connection between home and school. Creating a supportive and positive environment at home fosters knowledge, sparks curiosity, and builds self-confidence that leads to independence.

Not every activity in this book needs to be completed. Choose what works best for you and your family. Look for those positive moments. Find opportunities to talk together and, more importantly, to listen. Be there for your teen and allow them to let their growing independence shine brightly. And remember, the only thing harder than parenting a teenager is being one! So, give them some grace, provide them with guidance and tools for success, and feel confident knowing you are doing your best to raise a good human.

Social Media



The Dreaded “S” Word ➔ “S” as in *social* media. Believe it or not, social media can be used for good. However, there is definitely a dark side to it too. Ninety percent of teens ages 13–19 use multiple social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Discord, and others. A huge issue with these apps is the effect they have on the mental health of teenagers. These apps are filtered snapshots of life (often staged) that make it look like everything is perfect, when the reality is that it isn’t. Social media makes us think others have it better than we do, which can lead to depression or anxiety. You may think the answer is to ban your teen from social media entirely! Good luck—they will likely find a way around that. A better solution is to have conversations (not lectures) with your teen about social media so they understand its harmful effects. But also try to suggest ways it can be used for good. Social media can keep you connected to loved ones who live far away. It can also be used to promote positivity. Be sure to take a look at your own social media use because what your teen sees you doing influences their actions. You might think you are only on Instagram for a few minutes, but if you check your phone’s usage time, you might be surprised—and not in a good way!

Fake Apps

Just like your teen might have a fake account, there are also fake apps out there to disguise other social media activity. One common one is a calculator app that can be downloaded (so not the one that comes with the phone). It looks like a calculator and even works like one, but when you enter a passcode and hit % to enter, you can store pictures, content, and contacts. For just 99 cents, you can store files and have access to a hidden browser. Along the same lines, be suspicious of any secondary texting apps. Some teens will choose to pay for an app that gives them a different texting number that they will use to connect with people you don’t want them to (or people they want to keep you from knowing about). One way to help reduce the chance of your teen having access to content they aren’t allowed to is to make it so you have to grant permission for any apps downloaded to their phone. You can do this by having a Family Sharing or Family Link account on your own phone. This gives you control over what they have access to and if they have to ask permission to buy apps.



Top, alphaspirit; Adobe Stock. Bottom, Aistock Productions, Adobe Stock.

Ways Teens Can Use Social Media for Good

Write or post reels of book or film reviews.

Go viral with a kindness campaign (post about something positive or leave a positive comment and encourage others to do the same and see how far and wide you can spread the idea).

Host a virtual talent show.

Host a fundraiser (for example, collect funds for an animal shelter).

Create a podcast and interview teens doing good things.

Join a group with similar interests (sports, LGBTQ+ support, theater, music, church group, etc.).

Connect with out-of-town family members.

Learn about cultural events near you.

Follow and share inspiring stories.

Promote events that help the community (for example, beach clean-ups or clothing drives).

Hidden Dangers

Let's say you allow your teen to be on social media and you monitor their activity. But you suspect that there is more to the story. Trust your gut because it is pretty common for teens to have fake accounts. They'll have the one that you know about, and then they will have their "real" one that shows more of what is *really* happening in their life. If you do discover a fake account, talk about it together. Tell your teen you want them to be safe. Talk about social media use and how to have healthy boundaries. They may not appreciate that now, but eventually, they will realize how it is better to develop a real, truthful identity safe from the unhealthy pressures that can occur with social media use.



Parent Pointer

You are still the boss of your teen when it comes to their phones. Teens so often think that just because it is theirs, that they have the ultimate say in its use. However, you are the parent, and you set the boundaries. Determine what apps they are allowed to use, how much time they are allowed to spend on their phones, and make sure that you have access to all passwords.

Inappropriate Images

This isn't exactly social media related, but it can be. It can also be done with a simple text or a photo. Sexting is sending inappropriate, often nude, photos of themselves or others to someone else. Teens need to know that nothing on the internet is private, and anything can be uploaded in seconds. It is dangerous for their reputations and can affect their careers if they are sending or receiving inappropriate photos. A good rule is: If Grandma shouldn't see it, don't send it!