

# Helping children and young people learn



## What you can do in secondary school

Parents' engagement with young people's learning and education is important in the secondary school years. It is related to their academic success, career aspirations and their wellbeing; however, research tells us that parents' connection to the school and learning can drop off as they become teenagers.

This fact sheet contains tips and ideas for families to help their young person's learning throughout secondary school.

Be sensitive to how teenagers want to be more independent, while giving them structure and support.

Value education and show that you do.

Discuss aspirations and expectations for your child's education and future achievement.

Create a stimulating and supportive home learning environment.

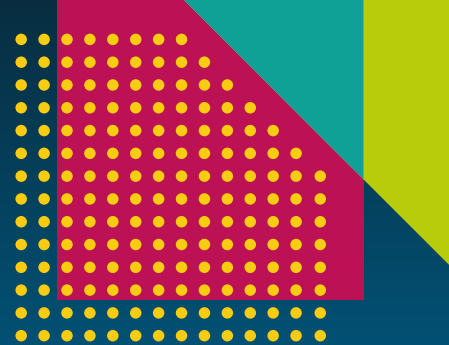
Have conversations and participate with them in activities relevant to learning and the wider world.

Keep connections and communication open with teachers and support staff in secondary school.

Balance support for school expectations such as homework with the need adolescents have for independence and other parts of life such as sport or work.



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## Why it matters

“Family involvement in education – defined as parenting, home-school relationships, and responsibility for learning outcomes – is just as important for older youth as it is for younger children.” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007)

**The benefits of parents staying involved in their child’s secondary school education include:**

improved academic achievement

higher completion rates

young people with stronger aspirations for post-school learning and employment

positive student attitudes and behaviour within school

increased self-esteem and productive social relationships amongst adolescents

fewer mental health issues

improved attendance rates.

## Why it’s challenging

**There are many reasons why parents might be less involved in the secondary school years:**

Teenagers naturally become more independent, play a more active role in their education and begin to question their parents’ authority. For parents this means that the way they used to support their child’s learning may start to become more difficult.

Secondary schools are set up differently from primary schools, with different structures and processes in place to communicate student progress. As a child grows older, parents may feel less confident about being involved in their child’s learning, particularly as the content of school work becomes more complex or they take on specific interests.

In secondary school, the style of communication changes and parents may feel that there are fewer ‘invitations’ to participate, both from students themselves, and from schools.



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## What matters most

Research shows that children's development in secondary school is strongly influenced by the value families place on school, their expectations and aspirations for their young person's future.

When parents and caregivers create an environment at home that encourages and supports learning, it influences how children learn, more than direct parental involvement with the subjects they are studying.

Here are some examples of things that parents can do throughout secondary school.

### **Be sensitive to how teenagers want to be more independent, while giving them structure and support:**

Have a supportive parenting style that is warm, responsive, and firm but democratic (rather than relying on one-sided parent control and decision-making).

Enable and encourage your child to engage in autonomous or joint decision-making.

Help your child to develop their own schedules, routines and processes for managing school, homework and other aspects of their lives.

Allow your child to take an active role in solving their own problems.

Sustain consistent levels of parental support and supervision and maintain an adequate level of discipline (eg some 'house rules' in relation to screen time, chores, etc).



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## Discuss aspirations and expectations for learning:

Communicate and reinforce the value of education for your child's future.

Express high but realistic educational goals for your child.

Have aspirations for and encourage your child to complete school and go onto further education.

Have discussions about post-school education options, courses and careers.

Talk positively with your child about the things they are good at, provide specific praise.

Encourage them to learn from their mistakes.

## Create a stimulating and supportive home learning environment:

Have books and other learning resources available at home.

In your home life, show that learning and education are valuable. For example, parents reading at home, having conversations about learning.

Take your teenager places outside of school, such as cultural activities, community gardening, sports, trips to museums, libraries, community events, music, dance and more.

Help support them and keep them healthy. For adolescents, it is particularly important to get enough sleep (between 9 and 10 hours), Parents can also provide support for stress and emotional anxiety, provide good nutrition, and help young people with time and resource management.



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## Have conversations relevant to learning:

Have frequent discussions about school, learning and educational matters – this includes actively listening too.

Engage in conversations and choices around future course selection, further education and careers.

Discuss big ideas around politics, society, science and culture and link these to school work where possible.

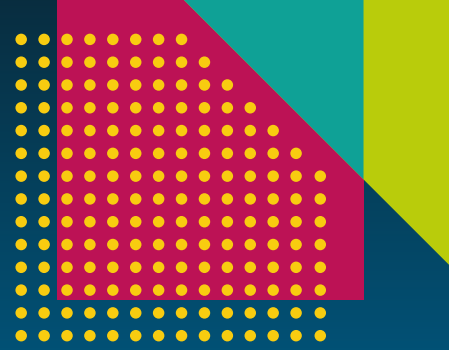
Talk about books, movies, documentaries, television, online media (eg what your child is reading or watching).

Ask questions in ways to encourage a discussion, rather than 'yes or no' answers.

- ask open-ended questions and seek opinions
  - *what did you enjoy...?*
  - *what do you think about...?*
  - *why did you like/dislike...?*
- give encouragement
- don't ask a question and rush in with the answer
- develop influence through questioning rather than giving an opinion
- be mindful of tone – limit sarcasm and irony.



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## Keep connections and communication open with school:

Maintain links with your child's secondary school and engage in discussions with teachers in formal and informal ways (eg at parent-teacher evenings, school events, phone calls, email, read newsletters).

Be an active partner with your child and the school in discussions, planning and processes for future course selection, further education, and career options.

Attend course counselling sessions with your child.

Make contact with as many of your child's teachers as possible, as early as possible, establish the best ways to keep in touch, and let them know you are available to discuss progress.

Establish who is the key contact person for your child (eg the care group teacher or home group teacher). This teacher will be in charge of the overall wellbeing of your child, and monitor progress and achievement.

Ask your child's consent before contacting school, and tell them about your communications.

## Provide appropriate support for homework:

Support your child to develop their own schedules for doing their homework and managing other activities like sport or work.

Ensure your child has a quiet and organised space for doing their homework – your local library might be a good spot if there isn't room at home.

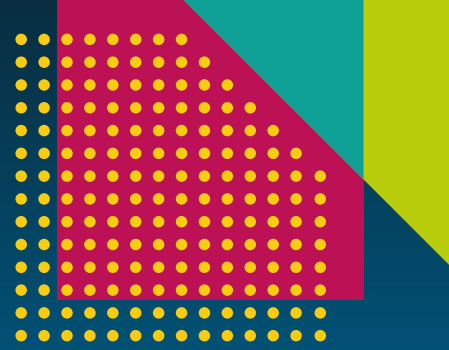
Try to avoid direct involvement in homework when your child does not need help, particularly as they get older.

Show interest in what your child is learning and doing at school and what homework they may have (eg during chats at the dinner table).

Do not do your child's homework for them – allow them to 'grapple' with challenging problems.



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## Where can I find more information?

### **Kids Matter - information for families about wellbeing and relationships**

[www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters)

### **Raising children – ideas for communicating with teenagers**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/communicating\\_relationships/teens\\_communicating.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/communicating_relationships/teens_communicating.html)

### **Raising children – ideas for wellbeing of teenagers**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/health\\_wellbeing/teens\\_health.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/health_wellbeing/teens_health.html)

### **Learning Potential – a smart phone app developed by the Australian government**

[www.learningpotential.gov.au](http://www.learningpotential.gov.au)

### **Parenting SA - for parenting information and guides**

[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)

## About this information

These fact sheets were adapted from a series developed by the ACT Education and Training Directorate in partnership with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and representatives of ACT independent, and Catholic schools and parent organisations. The material in this fact sheet is Creative Commons and is based on international research and consultation with teachers and parents.

