



High School as a Balancing Act

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I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT WE ALL need balance in our lives to help us maximize our time and feel like the best version of ourselves. This day-to-day balance includes juggling hard work and leisure time as well as time with family and friends. If we do not maintain some stability, we run the risk of dropping everything. Often we have to ask ourselves, how can I find a way to function to the best of my abilities?

Teenagers are no exception to this equation. There are many factors to balance, including school pressure, homework, family time, social life, emotions, sleep and relaxation, as well as religion/church groups, sports, clubs, and other outside activities. It can be very difficult to figure out how to manage time effectively.

To help adolescents find the right balance, start with understanding what types of goals and commitments they have. Typically, staying current with schoolwork, having a positive relationship with friends and family, and caring for personal well-being are important priorities for teenagers and their families.

Talking with them about their priorities may help boost adolescents' motivation and task completion in these different areas:

■ STAYING ORGANIZED.

Invest time into maintaining a calendar and an assignment notebook to stay on top of

schoolwork as well as social and family activities. Although many teenagers resist writing information down, many times it allows the mind to focus more energy on completing the task instead of on remembering the task. Having a better handle on responsibilities (as well as anticipated events) will allow more efficient planning and preparation.

■ **STAYING CONNECTED.** As the school year progresses, many times the demands of classes and activities increase, and it feels as though there is no time for much else. This can be

a very isolating and stressful time. Evidence supports our need for relationships and human connection to keep our mood positive. Possible suggestions for interaction include having dinner with family members, making time to converse with friends, and studying with friends.

■ **STAYING UNPLUGGED** (at least for a short while each day). Technology is

amazing and allows us to constantly be connected to phone calls, texting, social media, videos, the Internet, video games—the list goes on and on. For some, this means that they are basically “on-call” 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, which doesn’t allow much downtime. At times, this may feel like an overwhelming responsibility. Do what you can to help them unplug

from this pressure. Leave the cell phone in another room during homework, limit screen time, turn off electronics during meals. You will probably find that this disconnect allows for more valuable effort in work and relationships.

■ **STAYING HEALTHY.** Much of the time, we struggle to find time for ourselves and the rituals we need to feel our best, such as sleeping eight hours, eating well-balanced meals, keeping up with personal

hygiene and medications, and following through with appointments. Without taking time for self-

care, we run the risk of burning out and even shutting down.

Part of staying healthy includes understanding and managing your emotional health. It is very normal to have good days and bad days, stressful days and excited days. However, if your mood impacts your ability to function, then it would be worthwhile to look for additional support. Resources may include family, therapists, psychiatrists, school counselors, and friends, who can help you build more positive coping skills.

Remember that staying balanced includes the need to engage in positive and gratifying activities, such as yoga, prayer, exercise, drawing, journaling, reading, and more. By keeping yourself happy and balanced, you will allow for more productive overall functioning. ■

Dr. Danielle Romano-Cihak is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist who enjoys working with children, adolescents, and families to support healthy relationships and positive coping skills.

“Balance is not something you find, it’s something you create.” — Jana Kingsford



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Q&A

Q I can't get my 15-year-old daughter to open up to me. How can I improve our connection?

A Just as a flower doesn't move from seed to bloom in a day, a strong connection with a teen doesn't happen overnight either. Teens need to know that you care and are really interested in them before they will open up to you about the important things in their lives.

Think of it as preparing the soil. **First**, spend more time with your teen doing something that she (hopefully you, too) enjoys. **Second**, talk with her about things she is interested in. In other words, start to learn about her world. **Third**, ask her opinion about a variety of topics, ranging from movies to current events to social and spiritual issues. An important reminder: When she shares her opinion, don't correct it, just listen and understand it. **Fourth**, begin to initiate more light, affirmative physical contact (e.g., a squeeze on the shoulder), as this is a powerful connection-builder.

As you continue these four steps, you should find that your daughter will gradually become more open to talking about important and even personal issues with you. Why? Because you are investing time into her and are showing her that you really care about her life. ■

Todd Cartmell, Psy.D., is the author of five faith-based parenting books and works with children, adolescents, and families to help them make the most of their connections and relationships.

When Teens Act Out

LET'S FACE IT—TODAY'S KIDS deal with a lot of pressures, including academics, social rejection, poverty, violence, abuse, parental problems, and gangs. Kids may also be concerned about religion, gender roles, values, or ethnicity. Parents and their teenagers are both struggling with the youth's wanting independence while still needing parental guidance. Sometimes all these conflicts result in behavior problems.

Any number of isolated behavior problems can represent adolescent problems and delinquency—shoplifting, truancy, a fight in school, drugs, or alcohol. Sometimes kids can't easily explain why they act the way they do; they may be just as confused about it as the adults. Parents and loved ones may feel scared, angry, frustrated, or hopeless. They may feel guilty and wonder where they went wrong. All these feelings

are normal, but it is important to understand that there is help available to troubled kids and their families.

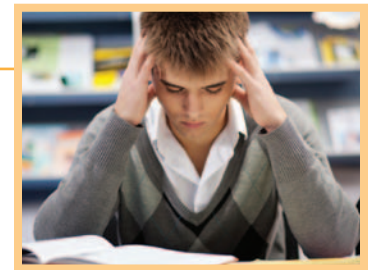
How do you know when to seek help?

What are the signs of trouble? How does a parent know when a youth is headed for more serious problems, or when bad behavior is just "a kid being a kid"?

Try to focus on patterns rather than an isolated event. The patterns signaling the need for help include not only deviant behaviors by the adolescent, but also the presence of other problems in the family or tensions at home, e.g., problems in the parents' marriage or frequent fighting or hostility among family members. The problem behaviors and other family issues can interact and feed off each other, so that it is hard to tell where everything started.

An important first step to find out what is going on is to talk to the adolescent and other family members about what is happening, possible reasons, and potential solutions. Others who know the adolescent and family, such as teachers or caregivers, may also be able to provide information about the youth's mood or behaviors outside of the home to help assess the severity of the problem. Engaging in psychotherapy to develop a safe environment for the adolescent can be instrumental in identifying the problem contributing to a young person's behavior and ways to resolve it. ■

Bonnie Knox, L.C.P.C., C.A.D.C., provides individual and family therapy to adolescents and adults. In addition to treating depression and anxiety disorders, she also specializes in offering EMDR services and addictions treatment.



College Admissions and Stress

THE COUNTDOWN STARTS IN junior year of high school. College visits, standardized testing, applications, and essays are some of the challenges that college-bound students and their families will face. Many high schoolers are already dealing with stressors such as homework, dating, peer pressure, maintaining grades, sports or other extracurricular activities, and jobs. Adding extra worries over choosing and being accepted into the right college can be downright overwhelming.

A good way to approach the college admissions process is to take it one step at a time. Set up a game plan with deadlines agreed upon by both parents and students. This will help to keep stress at a manageable level. While it is helpful for parents to assist students, they must be careful not to turn the process into a power struggle. Parents can certainly respect students' choices

within reason. In addition, school counselors can be major resources to both parents and students. A team effort with the student taking the lead works best.

Parents and students need to be open to more than one college. Americans have become obsessed with "brands," and this has translated into the belief that the student must be accepted into one certain college in order to have a successful life. A list of four or five possibilities will help students avoid feeling devastated if they are not accepted into the college they had their heart set on.

Maintaining perspective is important for parents who want to help their students with the admissions process. For example, if a student's ACT scores are lower than hoped for, parents can either encourage students to retake the test, or they can rule out certain colleges. If a student is unsure of

a major, community college or colleges that welcome undecided majors are good options.

While the choice of college will have a strong impact on the student's life, parents and students must remember nothing is written in stone. If the student determines that the college is not a good fit, for whatever reason, there is always the opportunity to transfer.

Above all, keep a sense of humor. It will make the whole process much easier for all concerned. ■

Lisa Hopkins, N.C.C., L.C.P.C., C.A.D.C., P.C.G.C., enjoys working with college-aged students and their families. She has been through the college selection process herself a few times with her own children, and thus speaks from experience.