



PROGRESSING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

PARENT FACT SHEET

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL

Parental engagement in young people's learning and education remains important and influential during the high school years and is related to young people's academic success and their wellbeing at high school. But studies show that engagement in learning and families' relationships with schools can often decline as young people move into high school.

This fact sheet contains tips and ideas to assist families to help their young person's learning throughout the high school years.

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)

There are many benefits related to parental engagement throughout the high school years, including:

- improved academic achievement;
- higher graduation rates;
- young people with stronger aspirations for post-school learning and employment;
- positive student attitudes and behaviour within school;
- increased self-esteem and social relationships amongst adolescents; and
- fewer mental health issues.

WHY IT'S CHALLENGING

Despite the benefits, parental engagement sometimes declines through the high school years.

This can happen because:

- During adolescent development children can become more autonomous, play a more active role in their education and begin to question their parent's authority. For parents this can mean that previous ways of engaging in their child's learning, for example during earlier childhood, can start to become more difficult.
- High schools are set up differently to primary schools, and this can be challenging for parents to navigate – especially for communication between home and school and knowing who to contact for information about how the young person is getting on or if there are any challenges.
- As a child grows older parents may feel less confident about being involved in their learning and education as the content of school work becomes more complex.
- In high school, parents can feel that there are fewer 'invitations' to participate, both from students, as they become more autonomous in their learning, and from schools, as the style of communication between parents and teachers changes.

WHAT MATTERS MOST?

Research shows that the value families place on school, their expectations and aspirations for their young person's future are the most influential factors. Parents' aspirations are related to a range of positive impacts in the high school years. [Family-led, home-based aspects of parent engagement](#), such as providing a general environment that supports and encourages learning, have more impact than parents having direct involvement in the content of what young people are learning at school.

Based on these findings, there are some [key principles](#) that parents can keep in mind for parental engagement in the high school years:

- Being sensitive to the increasing autonomy and independence of adolescents while retaining a supportive structure
- Affirming the value of education
- Demonstrating aspirations and expectations for your child's education and future achievement
- Aiming to provide a stimulating and supportive home learning environment
- Engaging your child in conversations and activities relevant to learning and the wider world
- Keeping connections and communication open with teachers and support staff at high school. Being involved in activities and events at school can be a good way to be part of your school community but is not the most important way to support your young person's learning
- Balancing support for learning activities, such as homework, with the growing independence and autonomy of adolescents.

EXAMPLES OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

The following table provides examples of things that parents can do which are based on these key principles.

Key principles	Examples of things families can do to help
Being sensitive to increasing autonomy and independence of adolescents, while retaining a supportive structure	• Have a supportive parenting style which is warm, responsive, and firm but democratic (as opposed to one characterised by one-sided parent control and decision-making) • Enable and encourage your child to engage in autonomous and/or joint decision-making • Support your child in developing 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 'moderate' levels of parental support and supervision and maintain adequate level of discipline (e.g. some 'house rules' in relation to screen time, chores etc).
Demonstrating aspirations and expectations for learning	• Communicate the value of education for your child's future • Express high (but realistic) educational goals for your child • Have aspirations for and display encouragement for your child to complete school and go onto further education • Be actively involved in discussions about post-school education options, courses and careers • Talk positively with your child about the things they are good at, provide authentic praise and encourage them to take the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and apply these lessons to future learning.
Aiming to provide a stimulating and supportive home learning environment	• Have books and other learning resources available in the home • Model behaviours that promote learning and demonstrate education is valued (e.g. parents reading in the home, conversations between parent and child about learning) • Engage your child in out-of-school learning experiences, such as cultural activities, community gardening, attending sporting events, trips to museums, libraries, community events, music, dance etc • Provide a supportive environment for child health and wellbeing more generally. For adolescents, these things are particularly important: managing fatigue and ensuring adequate sleep (between 9-10 hours); supporting stress and emotional anxiety; providing adequate nutrition to support brain and body development; and help with time and resource management • Links to further information are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

Key principles	Examples of things families can do to help
Maintaining child-parent interaction relevant to learning	• Have frequent discussions about school, learning and educational matters • 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 (e.g. what your child is reading or watching) • Use communication strategies that maintain engagement with adolescents: ask open-ended questions and seek opinions; give encouragement, don't ask a question and rush in with the answer; develop influence through questioning rather than giving an opinion; limit use of sarcasm and irony.
Keeping connections and communication open with school	• Maintain links with your child's high school and engage in discussions with teachers where opportunities are presented (e.g. through attendance at parent-teacher evenings, school events, school drop-off and pick-up) • Be an active partner (with child and school) in discussions, planning and processes for future course selection, further education, and career options • Introduce yourself to your child's teacher(s) at the start of each school year; establish best ways to communicate and keep in touch, and make it known you are available to discuss progress.
Providing support for homework which is appropriate to adolescence	• Support your child to develop their own structures and schedules for doing their homework • 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 age and become more independent) • Show interest in what your child is learning and doing at school and what homework they may have (e.g. through chats at the dinner table).

WHAT ACT HIGH SCHOOL PARENTS HAVE TO SAY...

WHY IT'S CHALLENGING...

"They withhold information, but that's their power though, isn't it?!"

(ACT High School parent)

"There's the whole business of becoming an independent person, so I know that she's pushing me away at the moment because she has to and I know that that's ok and she'll come back, as [my sons] came back."

(ACT High School parent)

"Obviously one of the biggest struggles with high school is... they have got eight different teachers and how those eight teachers are supposed to know your child as an individual is a huge problem. So I don't know how you combat that..."

(ACT High School parent)

WHAT WORKS...

"I think that modelling is really important, if you value education. Simple things like eating round the table and that's when you can talk about homework and you can talk together about what issues have arisen, how they've dealt with things, how they could have done things differently. Just listening to what's happening..."

(ACT High School parent)

"You want to engage that motivation... and if you've got that then, you know, they will get involved and enjoy (hopefully!) what they're doing in high school, because... you want them to engage and transition to being adult learners. That's the sort of ideal that you're really working towards, you know, to light that spark for them, sort of thing."

(ACT High School parent)

WHAT WORKS... CONT.

"I think being with them and being available and not necessarily forcing yourself on them all the time, but just being around in their space and always just lurking as they say, you know, just so you're there when they decide they want to talk to you, like at 1am in the morning when they come in and they say 'I can't get to sleep,' you know... Just when they need you being there and not only when they're struggling... just putting a meal on the table, providing a bit of structure and stability as well can be really useful."

(ACT High School parent)

"So if she knows that her teachers and I are on the same page and we know that she can do something then that's very powerful, you know, and I know that she sort of sits there and rolls her eyes... but it's that partnership with the parents and the staff, the teachers, that I find is the most influential on her."

(ACT High School parent)

"You have to have balance outside of school or learning whether that's sport, or Guides, or Scouts, or whatever it might be. So they're not just focused on schoolwork, or the next assignment, or hockey training, or whatever it might be; they're focused on lots of little things so they've got goals to achieve every week, not just pressure of 'you're doing well with the schoolwork' and so on."

(ACT High School parent)

"Well, I want them to know that I'm there supporting them. So, just that time thing is important. But also you don't want children that aren't capable of being independent either, you want them to be able to grow and learn, so I suppose sometimes when I'm being told 'don't micromanage me, mum,' I kind of like that in a way too because it means that they are stepping up above and beyond."

(ACT High School parent)

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters>

http://raisingchildren.net.au/communicating_relationships/teens_communicating.html

http://raisingchildren.net.au/health_wellbeing/teens_health.html

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The ACT Education Directorate partnered with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. Together, the alliance developed a shared understanding of parental engagement in the ACT, based on what the evidence shows has the biggest impact and the things that matter most to ACT families and schools. The international evidence has been reviewed and parents and teachers have been consulted on what is important to them.

