Your Teen

Annual College Issue!
Gearing Up for College
A Grade-By-Grade Guide

When You’re Worried About Your Teen’s Mental Health
Understanding Your Quiet Kid

SCHOOLWORK
Avoiding the Power Struggle

Planning a Big Trip?
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NBA Star
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College:
A Year-by-Year Readiness Guide
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Cover photo by Beth Segal
With our signature focus on experiential learning, HB empowers girls of all ages to find their passions, embrace challenges, gain confidence, and maximize their own potential.
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BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
EDITOR’S LETTER

Hindsight is 20/20

When one of my kids would deal with a complicated problem, I found it all-consuming. But once it was over, I would look back and think, “That wasn’t so bad. It all worked out.”

And it did seem to work out. So, when someone describes a situation with similar facts, I’m tempted to respond with that casual don’t worry, it will all work out.

Yet, as we all know, it doesn’t always work out. More importantly, we have no way of knowing in advance.

College admissions is one perfect example. The process is so stressful because the outcome seems so significant.

Our youngest is a high school junior. We’ve done college four times already. The fifth time we’re very laid back. Now my narrative is that I’m easygoing about college. And I am, now.

Let me take you back to our first go-round. #1 started SAT tutoring in 10th grade. (#5 will likely never see a tutor.) #1 played flute, did musical theater, played volleyball and basketball. In other words, her day was jam-packed with extracurriculars. Yet, I nagged her to participate in every additional opportunity because it would look good on her resume. (#5 has one activity—football.) There’s more to admit, but let’s just say I was emotionally overinvested in #1’s success.

When it was time to apply to college, #1 applied early decision to her dream school. Notification day arrived, and I couldn’t breathe. Literally. My heart was pounding. In my mind, #1’s future rested on this one decision.

In retrospect, I know that she would have been happy at many schools. And if she had landed somewhere that wasn’t a good fit, she could have transferred. But during my first experience with a college hopeful, too much was at stake to be chill.

What have I learned? We can’t ever know if everything will work out. The best scenario is that we have raised children who can find a way to make wherever they are the place they were meant to be—and, if all else fails, find a way to get out of a bad situation.

Maybe what we should say isn’t, “It always works out.” Instead, we can say, “We do our best to make it work out.”

In this annual college issue, we share information you need to do your best to work out the college application process. We’ve also got great information on when to get mental health help for your teen, when to loosen the digital connection with your kids, what you should know about edible pot, how to save on that dream family vacation—and, of course, much more.

As we begin another year, with its ups and downs still to come, you can count on this: Your Teen will be here to help make sure it all works out. Best wishes to you and yours for a healthy, happy 2018!

Susan

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

WANDA DURANT
How does a young, single mom raise two successful men (including NBA star Kevin Durant)? Your Teen found out. Our interview with this extraordinary mother is on page 56.

DEVORAH HEITNER
We parents may be intimidated by the screen takeover of our kids’ lives, but Devorah Heitner, author of Screenwise, isn’t. On page 27, she gives her sensible take on teens who don’t answer our texts.

MELISSA FENTON
Melissa Fenton is the writer behind the popular blog 4 Boys Mother and, yes, the mother of four sons. But that doesn’t mean she has all the answers—turn to page 26 to read about her parent-teen dilemma.

PHYLLIS FAGELL
You may know Phyllis Fagell for her savvy advice on navigating middle school and adolescence. Now, get to know her as a reader and a mom—she and her daughter Emily review the coming-of-age novel Purple Hibiscus on page 25.
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We asked teens...

What’s something your parents do for you that you’re probably old enough to do for yourself? Do you like having the help, or do you wish they’d stop?

Cleaning my room. I wish they would stop.
Alex, Lakewood, OH

Putting deodorant on me.
Drew, Missouri

My parents still do my laundry for me, which I appreciate, but I feel that laundry is a skill I’ll need to learn for myself.
ilana, Atlanta, GA

My mom still tries to do my work for me. I appreciate it, but I wish she’d let me do it on my own.
Macy, Alpharetta, GA

Cooking. I love having the help.
Alexi, Cleveland, OH

Laundry—I appreciate that my mom still does my laundry; it’s one less thing I have to worry about until I’m in college.
Amanda, Grand Rapids, MI

Packing up my after-school snack. I’m honestly grateful for it because it’s less work for me!
Ben, Cleveland, OH

My mom still schedules my doctor appointments. I love having the help!
Jamie, Beachwood, OH

Washing my clothes—and I like having their help.
Libby, Milton, GA

Picking up after myself. Yes, I like the help!
Liam, West Des Moines, IA

My mom still makes and sometimes packs my lunch for school the night before even though I could probably start doing it myself. I appreciate the help because otherwise I would probably forget.
Madison, Shaker Heights, OH

#ParentHack
A Simple College Chore That Pays Big

When I graduated from high school, I was eager to get out of my parents’ house and finally be on my own. Ready to enjoy college, I searched for every opportunity to have fun. It’s fair to say that studying and academics were not always my first priorities.

My father must have known this, possessing the deep wisdom of a father of 13 kids. He knew exactly how to keep me responsible, focused, and accountable for my grades and behavior. Each semester, he mailed me my tuition check at college. It was then my responsibility to walk the check into the college office of student accounts.

I remember looking at that check and seeing how much my parents were paying for me to go to college. That check made me recognize what a sacrifice they were making for me and my education. I felt a responsibility to maximize my college experience. It was really hard for me to think about blowing off class or taking a nap instead of studying. And every semester for four years, that check kept on reminding me and keeping me focused.

That’s not to say I didn’t have fun. But getting that tuition check and being responsible for paying my tuition bill helped me to remember my priorities. Dad knew what he was doing.

My oldest son is in college now. And, yes, I mail his tuition check to him.

Bobby Kloska, South Bend, Indiana
Begin your college career in a women-focused, supportive environment where you will develop the leadership skills and confidence to thrive.
BOOK RECOMMENDATION

No More Mean Girls
by Katie Hurley

Every mom has a story to tell about a mean girl she knew in school. Unfortunately, in our connected social-media-influenced culture, the mean girls are getting younger. To address the issue, Katie Hurley, a child and adolescent psychotherapist, has written No More Mean Girls, a guide for parents of girls who are experiencing the struggle of what it means to be popular at an increasingly younger age.

No More Mean Girls offers useful advice and hands-on solutions for parents to help their daughters build confidence and compassion while navigating the challenging world of peer groups and peer pressure. Hurley lays out the consequences for girls focused on living up to labels and seeking superficial approval from their peers, and she shows parents how to help redirect that focus into developing healthy friendships, building self-confidence, and creating awareness of social responsibility.

Hurley calls her book “a call to action to empower young girls to work through their obstacles, work together, and build each other up.” Ignoring the appeal of social hierarchies and resisting the urge to belong to a coveted group has never been easy, but it’s even harder for girls who haven’t yet learned to use their voices to stand up for themselves. No More Mean Girls is a terrific jumping-off point in addressing what it means to be authentic in a world of cliques and clicks.

—Kristina Wright

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61% of parents with a 13-17-year-old have checked the websites their teenager visited.

---

3 tablespoons of donated blood can save a baby’s life. January is National Volunteer Blood Donor Month.

---

11.5 million females will attend college in the United States in fall 2017, compared with 8.9 million males.

---

64% of teenage boys have been in love, compared with 59.6% of teenage girls.

---

67% of teens prefer dogs over cats. 7% of teens have never owned a pet.
STUFF WE LOVE

Keeping Cozy

Hex Performance Advanced Laundry Detergent
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Luxe by Mr. Bubble Bubbletini Bath Bombs
Cold outside? Sink into a warm, soothing, and moisturizing bath to help dissolve your worries away. Perfect to pair with your favorite cocktail—shaken, of course, not stirred. $8.99 mrbubbleluxe.com

Native Deodorant
We all sweat, but this deodorant can help turn that stink into lavender, or coconut and vanilla. Made without aluminum or parabens. $12 nativecos.com

Adoratherapy Vitality Chakra Spice
With expertly blended essential oils, it smells great while improving your mood and energy. You’ll feel like you, but better. $30 adoratherapy.com

Cleaning Up

Rumpl Down Puffy Blanket
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Lekue PopCorn Maker
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Verilux HappyLight Touch LED Light Therapy Lamp
Winter got you down? Come to the light! Get an intense 10,000 lux of light therapy to increase your energy, mood, focus, and sleep. $99 verilux.com
Winter Getaway

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thegrommet.com

Solo Bridgehampton Ladies Backpack
A preppy and polished take for the ladies. Synthetic exterior, tartan-blue and tan cloth interior, drawstring closure. Now you just need somewhere to take it! $89.99
solo.net

Body Glove Time After Time Bathing Suit
A modern take on the classic 1980s Body Glove swimsuit. Two bright colors to choose from. Voila! There's your pre-pregnancy body back! (Just kidding.) $122
bodyglove.com

Cep Ultralight Run Low-Cut Men's Socks
Not just another pair of exercise socks. YT staffer Eca's husband wore them once and asked for four more pairs. Because they're just that amazing. $20
cepcompression.com

Chooka Nina Rain Boots
Wear with your favorite leggings and tunic, and you'll be comfy and stylish no matter what winter throws at you. $85
shop.shopchooka.com
At-Home Spa Weekend

Plum Deluxe Tea
There’s always time for a cup of energy-boosting tea after a hard spa day. Hand-blended, small-batch, artisan loose-leaf teas. Organic, chemical-free and sulfite-free. $7 per bag plumdeluxe.com

Controlled Chaos Curl Crème
The Holy Grail hair product of every curly girl’s dreams. Controls your frizz and gives you those beautiful bouncy curls. Boom! $16.99 controlledchaoshair.com

Kevyn Aucoin Neo-Trio Palette
A face palette trio of best-selling shades. Use together or take apart for the perfect luminous face. Great for the makeup-loving girl in your life. $58 kevynaucin.com

Patricia Heaton Hope Bracelet
Everyone’s favorite TV mom, Patricia Heaton, has partnered with World Vision to design a wearable reminder of the power of hope and generosity to help those in need. The bracelet is a free gift with a $100 or more donation. When your friends ask about it—and you know they will—it will inspire their generosity, too. donate.worldvision.org

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2 CEUs
Giving Life
Has your teen registered to become an organ donor?

My two kids signed up to become organ donors without a second thought when they got their driver’s licenses. Their receptive attitude is consistent with that of today’s young people, says James Pardes, vice president of marketing and communications for the organ donation nonprofit LiveOnNY. “Organ donation is a cause that teens and young adults are embracing,” he says, whereas it might not be as comfortable for their parents.

WHY DONATE?
• On any given day, 117,000 people are waiting for an organ transplant.
• Nearly 2,000 of those waiting are children.
• A donor can save up to eight lives with organ donation and can heal up to 75 lives with tissue donation.

Registries in nearly every state, plus in Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, allow teens to sign up before age 18 (typically at 16 or 17). However, until teens turn 18, parents have the right to revoke the decision. Pardes recommends that teens discuss their wishes with their families before they register.

Some people are unsure about registering because of misconceptions. Be assured:
• Medical professionals responsible for a teen’s care will do everything they can to save that child’s life. (And your medical team isn’t even associated with the donor team.)
• Donation doesn’t cost the donor’s family anything.
• Most major religions allow organ donation. Talk to your religious leader if you aren’t sure.

No one wants to think about worst-case scenarios, Pardes says. But for many families, knowing that their teen articulates a wish to help others can be a great source of comfort.

Learn more at Donate Life America (donatelife.net), or register through your department of motor vehicle licensing.

—Joanna Nesbit
A Shot in the Arm
What You Need to Know About Teen Vaccines

About 90 percent of us think our teens are fully vaccinated, but we’re often wrong, according to a new University of Michigan study. In fact, less than half of teen boys complete the HPV (human papillomavirus) series, only 1/3 of teens receive the second dose of the meningitis vaccine, and most teens skip the flu shot altogether.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adolescents catch up on all childhood immunizations and receive additional vaccines for meningitis, HPV, diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis, and the flu.

Definitely make sure they’re fully immunized before they go to college, advises Dr. Sarah Garwood, adolescent medicine specialist and assistant professor of pediatrics at Washington University in St. Louis.

“Many colleges require the meningococcal vaccine and the tetanus vaccine to be up to date before entering school,” she says. “It’s not just that you’ve done the right thing.”

—Mary Helen Berg

VACCINES FOR TEENS

**Flu.** Get a shot or nasal spray vaccine each year, ideally before November. Your teen may still get sick, but the symptoms will be milder.

**Meningococcal.** Prevent bacterial meningitis, a dangerous and potentially deadly infection. Your teen needs two doses—one at 11 years old and a booster at 16.

**HPV.** Protect teens from human papillomavirus, which causes cervical, penile, anal, and some esophageal cancers. Your teen needs two shots before age 15, or three doses after 15.

**Tdap booster.** Tdap is the booster for the DTaP series of shots given in childhood. Teens need this to continue protection against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough).
KITCHEN FIRES
How to Handle this Emergency Like a Pro

By Jane Parent

Cooking equipment is the number one cause of house fires. Should a kitchen fire erupt despite your best precautions, it’s helpful to be able to recognize what type of blaze you have and how to put it out. Your Teen has the info that your teen needs to learn to be a cool responder in a hot situation.

Grease fires
Grease fires can’t be extinguished with water. Grease is lighter than water; it will float to the top and continue burning on the water’s surface. Instead, the way to handle a grease fire is to smother it with a pan lid and wait for it to die out. Or grab a box of baking soda and pour it over the fire to kill the flames. If the fire is too big for either of those options, then use a kitchen fire extinguisher. (You have one, right?)

Oven fires
If a blaze suddenly sparks up inside your oven, shut the door tightly. Do not open the oven door. Turn the oven off and back away. If you open the door, you risk burning your face or setting your hair or clothing on fire. Fire needs oxygen to thrive, and you’ll only be fanning the flames—literally—by opening the door. Let the fire die down, stay in the room, and keep an eye on things through the oven window. Once the oven has cooled completely, then you can clean it up.

Microwave fires
Turn off the microwave immediately, if it’s safe to do so. (If the fire has not affected the touchpad, it should be safe to touch.) This will stop the fan so it won’t feed oxygen to the flames. Then wait until the fire suffocates. Do NOT open the door while the fire is active. To minimize risk of fire, never attempt to heat articles that are not approved for use in microwaves. Do not use metal, metal-edged bowls, foil, or even twist ties. The metal can cause sparks or flashes, which can lead to a fire.

Electrical fires
Like grease fires, electrical fires cannot be eliminated with water. Instead, use a kitchen fire extinguisher. After you’ve put out an electrical fire, follow up with the fire department to ensure your kitchen is safe. To prevent electrical fires in the first place, make sure your outlets are not overloaded with too many appliances.

Mini Firefighter Fire Extinguisher
Every kitchen should have one. Compact, portable, and as easy to use as a can of hairspray. $19.99 minifirefighter.us

Photo: Beth Segal
MOMO MEATBALLS
WITH CILANTRO CHUTNEY

Serves 3 to 4 (makes 12 meatballs)

INGREDIENTS:

Sauce:
• 2 tbsp. yellow onion, chopped
• 1 28-oz. can or 24-oz. jar of crushed tomatoes (about 3 cups)
• ½ cup water

Meatballs:
• 1 lb. ground turkey (93 percent lean)
• ½ cup long-grain white rice or quick-cooking brown rice
• 1 tsp. ras el hanout spice blend
• 1 tsp. kosher salt

Chutney:
• 1 bunch cilantro (2 oz.), leaves and stems
• 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
• 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
• ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
• 1 large green onion, white and green parts cut into ½-inch lengths
• ½ tsp. kosher salt
• ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS:

1. To make the sauce, select the Sauté setting on the Instant Pot and heat the oil. Add the onion, and sauté for 10 minutes until softened and beginning to brown. Add the tomatoes and water, stir to mix well, and bring to a simmer.

2. To make the meatballs—in a bowl, combine the turkey, rice, ras el hanout, and salt, and mix with your hands until all of the ingredients are evenly distributed. Don’t worry about overmixing, as you want the rice and spices to be evenly incorporated into the meat.

3. When everything is well-combined, shape the mixture into 12 meatballs, each slightly larger than a golf ball. Place the meatballs in a single layer in the simmering sauce, and spoon a little of the sauce over the top of each one.

4. Secure the lid, and set the Pressure Release to Sealing. Press the Cancel button to reset the cooking program, then select the Poultry setting, and set the cooking time for 15 minutes at high pressure.

5. While the meatballs are cooking, make the chutney. In a mini chopper or in a mortar with a pestle, combine all of the chutney ingredients, and process or grind into a rough paste.

6. When the timer goes off, you can perform a quick release by moving the Pressure Release to Venting, or you can let the pressure release naturally and leave the meatballs on the Keep Warm setting for up to 10 hours.

7. Serve the meatballs in their sauce with a spoonful of chutney on top of each.


A Taste of Nepal in an Instant (Pot)

Pressure cookers offer a quick and convenient way to get a meal on the table without a lot of fuss. Chef Coco Morante’s Amazon-bestselling cookbook The Essential Instant Pot Cookbook has dozens of family-pleasing options for one-pot meals.

Chef Coco says: “This is one of my favorite recipes, inspired by a mind-blowingly delicious meal of momos (aka Nepalese pot stickers) I enjoyed one year at the Outside Lands festival in San Francisco. Folding beautiful dumplings is time-consuming and takes a lot of experience, so I’ve instead taken the basic flavors and infused them into turkey meatballs, adding rice to the ground meat for a one-pot meal—less work, similar flavors, and totally satisfying. I like them on their own, on top of zucchini noodles, or served with cauliflower rice on the side.”
Chelsea Werner started gymnastics at the age of four. She has since won four U.S. Special Olympics and two Special Olympics World Games, and she is now adding modeling to her resume. Chelsea also has Down syndrome. We spoke with Chelsea and her mom, Lisa, to learn more about their inspiring story.

“The new coach had expectations that Chelsea could do everything a normal gymnast could do. She treated Chelsea just like a regular gymnast.”

How did Chelsea first get involved with gymnastics?
Lisa: We have an athletic family, so when she was younger, we tried many sports. She showed a lot of interest in gymnastics. There wasn’t much potential, but she really enjoyed it.

When did you realize it was more than just a casual hobby?
Lisa: When she started to put in more hours of practice, we started to see some talent. We realized she was doing a lot more than we ever thought she would do, so we kept challenging her more and more and increasing the hours.

Chelsea, did you ever want to quit, or did you like it all along?
Chelsea: I liked it all along.

How important is the coach when it comes to gymnastics?
Lisa: The coach made all the difference. When Chelsea was eight, she started doing the Special Olympics. For two years, it was really low-key. Then we asked the coach to move from Level One to Level Two. The coach said that Chelsea would likely remain at Level Two her whole life. Right then we decided we needed to find someone who had higher expectations than that.

What made the next coach so much better?
Lisa: The new coach had expectations that Chelsea could do everything a normal gymnast could do. She treated Chelsea just like a regular gymnast. At first, it was shocking. People thought she was mean to Chelsea because she didn’t let Chelsea get away with bad form. If she didn’t do something right, she would have to do it over and over, just like regular gymnasts. In Special Olympics that was never seen. It was a completely different mindset than most Special Olympic teaching.
What was the hardest part about raising a teenager with Down Syndrome?
Lisa: The biggest issue for Chelsea has always been her speech. Trying to get more speech therapy in her school district was always a problem. We did a lot of private speech therapy. We had trouble accessing school resources that she is entitled to. Chelsea is happy by nature and very positive, so there haven’t been a lot of problems.

Did Chelsea ever have any social challenges at school?
Lisa: A little bit. Chelsea was a high school cheerleader, but we had to fight to get her on the team. They did let her on the team, but they didn’t let her do certain things, like she was excluded from halftime. The girls never really embraced her—they left her on her own. She loved being a cheerleader, but the team never included her like we had hoped.

What’s one message that you’d love to get across to other parents of kids with special needs?
Lisa: So many people who have children with special needs say that I am so lucky that my daughter is so talented. It makes no sense, because she wasn’t talented. She took last place for many years, but she stuck with it and trained hard. It really had nothing to do with being born talented.

When Chelsea was in the Special Olympics, there were a lot of girls who had more potential than Chelsea, but the parents never pushed them. They dropped out. It is surprising to me because I guess I was an athlete and always challenged myself. Other parents don’t realize that. They push their other kids but not a child with a disability.

What’s next for Chelsea?
Lisa: We keep thinking this will be her last year in gymnastics, but then she loves it so much. We just don’t really have to be at the highest level, putting in 20 hours a week anymore. We are trying to get more into modeling and advocacy because we feel she has proven everything she needs to prove. She loves modeling. She loves being on the runway, so that will be part of it.

Chelsea, which do you like better, gymnastics or modeling?
Chelsea: Modeling.

Interview by Susan Borison
INSPIRING STORIES. REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS. EMPOWERING THE FUTURE.

Celebrate the female scientists of the Museum, Northeast Ohio and beyond at this special series of exhibits, events and programs highlighting the incredible work of these inspirational women.

CMNH.ORG/WOMENINSCIENCE

Cleveland Museum of NATURAL HISTORY

1 WADE OVAL DRIVE, UNIVERSITY CIRCLE, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106
Keeping Girls Interested in Science

The research is solid: Girls are just as capable as boys when it comes to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

By Jennifer Proe

Boys are naturally better than girls at math and science.

Science is just too hard.

Science is only for geeks and nerds.

Those are just some of the misconceptions that prevent girls from exploring a career in the sciences.

As parents, we know better. We know our daughters can achieve anything they set their mind to. The question is: Do they know it, too?

A recent study led by Microsoft shows that while girls become very interested in STEM subjects around age 11, they tend to lose that interest by age 15. Very few regain it: Only 30 percent of the world’s current STEM researchers are women, according to research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Role Models Are Key

Isabel Sands, a freshman at Yale University, was the only girl in her AP physics class in her junior year of high school. “I think girls lose interest in science around high school because of a lack of easily visible role models,” she says.

The Microsoft study supports Sands’ hunch. Six in 10 girls said they would feel more confident pursuing a STEM career if they knew that men and women were equally employed in it. As the saying goes: You cannot be what you do not see.

Denise Su, curator of paleobotany and paleoecology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, knows this firsthand. “There aren’t that many women in my field, so most of my mentors were men,” she says. While her male mentors were supportive, she really blossomed in graduate school when she connected with her one and only female mentor, the curator of anthropology for a San Francisco natural history museum.

Just seeing another woman perform the role that Su aspired to was invaluable. “I learned so much from her,” says Su. “She let me explore things on my own and ask questions. When I got my first job interview, she told me to be myself, to stand up straight, what to wear, to have a firm handshake. Things that a male mentor might not have wanted to tell me.”

Nix the Negative Thinking

As an assistant professor, Su noticed that the intelligent young women in her classes doubted their abilities when it came to the sciences. Laura Clapp, also a freshman at Yale, says, “I think girls are surrounded by the message that they aren’t expected to succeed or be interested in science. I remember a boy in middle school telling me that boys are better at math and science than girls. And whenever I told people that AP physics was my favorite course, their reaction was always surprise.”

Parents can help build confidence by stressing a growth mindset, says Tori Cordiano, a clinical psychologist and director of research for Laurel School’s Center for Research on Girls. In the face of defeatist comments, she counsels, “You might respond by saying, ‘You’re right—science is hard, and your brain gets a great workout in that class. Your mistakes on the test can help you figure out how to study next time, and your performance will improve as your studying becomes more effective.’”

Allow Time to Tinker

Research points to one more way parents can help: Allow girls the same time and space to explore and tinker that we give boys. Says Su, “I grew up in an environment where I was encouraged to go outside and climb trees. I spent a lot of time getting dirty and watching nature.”

Su believes hands-on exploration is critical in connecting kids with science. “We need to take science out of that mystical realm, for boys and girls,” she says. “Anyone can be a scientist. It’s just a different way of interacting with the world.”

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I chose to review Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* because I wanted to read it a second time. The book is a glimpse into a very different world from mine, but it also captures what it feels like to be a young teen.

Kambili, the protagonist, is a quiet 15-year-old girl growing up in Enugu, Nigeria. To an outsider, Kambili lives an ideal life with a seemingly perfect family. Her father, Eugene, is a wealthy, religious businessman. He’s altruistic with those who share his beliefs, and he’s respected in his church community. Kambili’s mother, Beatrice, and brother, Jaja, are kind and loving.

However, Kambili’s life is far from peaceful. Behind closed doors, her father is abusive and short-tempered. In addition to dealing with her unstable family, she must live amidst political unrest during the Nigerian coup. Internally, Kambili is in turmoil, too. She carries the constant fear that she’ll fail to meet her father’s high expectations.

Everything changes when Kambili spends time with her Aunt Ifeoma and her cousins Chima, Obiora, and Amaka in Nsukka, Nigeria. Although Aunt Ifeoma and her family live in poverty, their household is full of affection and joy. In Nsukka, Kambili must adjust to unfamiliarity. It takes time to let down her guard. When she does break out of her shell, she falls in love, breaks rules she would never dare break in Enugu, and forms lasting friendships. However, Kambili’s world is then dramatically and shockingly upturned again. I’m left wondering how her life will turn out.

At first glance, Kambili and I don’t have much in common, yet I easily empathize with her. We’re both teenage girls learning how to navigate the highs, lows, and uncertainties that come with growing up. I can’t imagine my parents being upset with me for not finishing first in my class, but I do understand self-imposed pressure and the desire to do well.

Kambili also prompted me to imagine my future. Will it be necessary for me to leave behind everything that’s comfortable and safe to discover my true self? I started high school this fall, and Kambili’s journey is a good reminder that the unknown is full of possibilities. Like her, I may take some wrong turns, but that’s okay.

*Purple Hibiscus* is set far from my home, and Kambili’s life doesn’t resemble my own, but in the end it doesn’t matter. Teens will identify with her quest to become her own person and figure out what she values.

Emily Fagell, 14, is a ninth grade student at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.
Hello?
Why Aren’t You Answering My Texts?

Pay phones. Remember them? I sure do.

I remember knowing the exact location of the pay phones in and around my high school, and the one that stood at the end of the hall in my freshman college dormitory. It’s where I would stop after a late-night high school party and call my mom, letting her know I was on my way home. It’s where every few days at college I would call home “collect” and check in with the parents.

How lucky are we as parents not to have to depend on pay phones to stay in contact with our kids? Well, lucky—you bet.

But also slightly traumatized? Oh my word, YES. Why is that? Because when I call my son, I think that he should answer his phone the second it rings. And that same kid should respond to my texts like the country’s national security depends on it.

Sadly, I’ve learned none of that actually happens. You see, teens love their cellphones. They just don’t love them attached to the other end of their parents’ cellphones. For a typical mom like me who worries about the whereabouts of my teens when they’re away from home and on the road, cellphones seem like a lifesaver.

But to the average teenager? They are a massive nuisance. Having been told never to text and drive, my teens keep their phones turned off and in their backpacks on the drive to and from school. This means that when I call and get no answer, my mind instantly goes to images of them crashed into a tree.

“Mom, you said never to use our cellphones while driving, so it’s off. Now which is it? You want to talk to me, or you want me to drive?”

Sometimes they are wise beyond their years. The constant connection, with the expectation that teens be instantly responsive to calls and texts from their parents, is too big a burden for them. I need to constantly remind myself (and my panicked brain) of that.

It makes me almost want to go back to pre-cellphone times—and ironically, my son will agree with me on that!
Melissa and Casey’s dilemma may be a familiar one to other families. All of us are experiencing more connectivity anxiety. The ubiquity of smartphones means that it is theoretically possible to connect anytime and from anywhere.

This can create new social expectations for contact. If the possibility for constant connection exists, how do we balance that with the need to stay present and focused on our in-person experiences?

I got my first phone a few years ago when I started driving. My parents allowed it for safety reasons. I was excited to finally text and Snapchat with friends. And there were many times when a cellphone was a must-have for staying in contact with bosses, coaches, teachers—and, of course, my parents.

But that’s where the problems started—the contact with my parents.

I’m not as attached to my phone as they think I am. Meaning: I don’t always respond to texts and phone calls from my mom and dad the second I get them. I don’t even do that with my friends!

I think parents assume we have our phones in our pockets 24/7, like it’s an immediate lifeline and instant connection with them. Honestly, when I don’t answer or text right back, the last thing on my mind is the fact they are now beginning to panic and worry that something happened to me. I’m just going about my day and thinking I will call them later, or tomorrow.

At times, I almost think it’s worse that I have this thing in my pocket always demanding to be answered. (It can happen at the most awkward times. On a date and get a text from your mom? Total buzzkill.)

I know cellphones are a modern necessity, and my phone does help keep my parents calm and assured that I can reach them or some other help if need be. Still, I can’t help but think that whole generations of teenagers and college kids survived without this constant connection. Sometimes I almost wish we could go back to that. I think it would bring my parent’s sanity back—just a little.

As kids grow older, though, the approach should evolve. Boundaries and open discussion about communication expectations can help everyone avoid (most) hurt feelings and set realistic expectations.

In this situation, Casey sounds like he is doing an excellent job moving toward independence. If Melissa wants to set up a regular weekly call with him to say hi, at a time that works well for both of them, that might alleviate both of their frustrations.
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Worried About Grades? The (Power) Struggle is Real.

By Jennifer Proe

For Austin Hise, every school year started out strong. He had a binder for everything, he stayed on top of his assignments, and his grades were looking good.

"For the first two quarters of the year, I would be organized," says Austin. "Then winter break would come, and I would relax. I would go back to school not organized, and I stayed that way." As a result, his grades took a slide, and he fell further and further behind at school.

As college loomed ever closer, Austin’s mother fretted about his grades. “It’s hard to watch a disaster unfolding and not be able to stop it,” says Amy Hise. “I tried to give him techniques and tools that I thought could work for him. I reminded him about his homework every day.”

Her efforts were not well-received. “When a parent is nagging you to do something, you’re just not going to do it,” says Austin. "I can’t tell you why. That’s just the way it is."

The nightly battle over homework resulted in angry meltdowns for both parties, and Austin’s grades did not improve.

In frustration, Amy took a completely hands-off approach. “I thought maybe he would take ownership if I let him make his own mistakes,” she says. The results were no better.

Dona Matthews, a Toronto-based developmental psychologist, explains: “At this age, it’s common for teens to find school boring and irrelevant to their concerns.”

Matthews adds that teens are also sorting out their identity and need to separate from their parents. “When parents put too much emphasis on grades, kids often show their independence by doing poorly in their academics,” she says.

Whatever the cause, low grades can definitely be a source of angst for parents.

So, what’s the right approach? Emily Levitt, vice president of education at Sylvan Learning, says parents do need to stay involved. However, the goal is to gradually reduce the parent role and increase the student’s independence. To accomplish this goal, parents may also find it helpful to enlist the help of a third party, such as a tutor or therapist.

“Whatever amount of hovering you start with needs to decrease throughout their high school years,” says Levitt. “In middle school, you might need to check their assignments every week, but by high school, perhaps it might only be once a month. It depends on the individual needs of your student.”

Levitt provides an example of what a gradual transition might look like:

GRADE 7: Review homework on a daily basis with your student; help design a study schedule.
GRADE 8: Check grades once a week with your student, and make sure assignments are being handed in.
GRADE 9: Check in with your student monthly to make sure long-term assignments are on track.
GRADE 10: Before final exams, make sure your teen is up to date on work and has a study guide in place.

If your teen is reluctant to take ownership of their work, or the nightly battle over homework continues, an outside source may be your best bet. For Austin, working with a therapist helped him develop his own way to organize his day and stay on top of homework, without any (well, not much) nagging from his mother.

By breaking up his day into shorter periods of study and using online scheduling tools, Austin was able to stay focused and organized. But the key component was his ownership in those solutions.

Amy agrees. “The unhealthy pattern of nagging, bribing, threatening—none of that works. There has to be buy-in,” she says.

While it may take time to find the right balance of intervention and independence, finding a solution with—not for—your teen will go a long way toward restoring harmony at home.
WHAT’S YOUR NEXT MOVE?

A Grade-By-Grade Guide to College Readiness

College admissions causes a lot of angst among parents and their teenagers. No surprise, when the media narrative around college admissions tends to focus on how hard it is to get into college. Your Teen is here to help you with the climb—with advice that may surprise you and will most certainly reassure you.

Let’s start with the competitiveness of college admissions. There’s no denying that there are a handful of colleges that are very difficult to get into, even for the most qualified students. These include the Ivy League and similarly-ranked institutions.

What you might now know, however, is that 80 percent of colleges ranked by U.S. News and World Report accept more than 50 percent of their applicants.

“A mistake that families make is having more anxiety than necessary about this process,” says Cecilia Castellano, vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University.

“Among college counselors, there is a famous saying: ‘College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won,’ notes Terry McCue, a former high school college counselor and now a senior associate dean of admissions for Kenyon College. “This is not about a bumper sticker or whether your family and friends will recognize the name of the school. It’s about finding a school that’s a good match for your teenager. A place where she can thrive and reach her goals.”

At the end of the day, says Castellano, families across the United States are successfully launching their students into college each and every year—and so can you. “Millions of people apply to college every year. As long as your list has a variety of schools, your student is going to go to college,” she notes. “Just follow the directions, fill in the information, submit a good essay, meet the deadlines, and the process will happen.”
MIDDLE SCHOOL

Thinking about college in middle school feels, well, over the top. But there’s important groundwork to be laid during these years:

❖ **Focus on academics.** Academics are the single most important factor when it comes to college admissions, so make sure your middle schooler develops the study and homework skills he’ll need to do his best in high school.

❖ **Read, read, read.** Avid readers have a distinct advantage in the admissions process. Not only do these students do better on standardized tests—the SAT in particular, which is a vocabulary-rich test—but they’re often better writers (think: admissions essay).

❖ **Step back.** By middle school, it’s important to let your adolescent take the lead when it comes to school and other aspects of her life (like friends). There’s ample evidence that if parents are overly involved in managing their teenagers’ lives, those students can struggle when they get to college.

❖ **Think about costs.** If you’re worried about paying for college—and most of us are—take the time to calculate the amount you’ll likely be expected to pay. Consider setting up a savings account (like a 529 plan) to help cover those costs—even small amounts will help.

❖ **Transition to high school.** It can be hard for some students to make the transition to high school. If your student stumbles, don’t worry too much. Colleges like to see students who show growth during these years.

❖ **Academics.** Understand how colleges will scrutinize your teenager’s academic record (in other words, their transcript). Encourage your teenager to take courses that are challenging, but in which he can also do well. Keep reading!

❖ **Extracurriculars.** Let your teenager pick one or two extracurriculars they’re passionate about. Packing a resume full of extracurriculars to impress an admissions office is not necessary, and not effective.
High School Academics

Set Expectations, Pick Appropriate Classes

It’s not helpful to make high school all about college. That’s stressful, and it also diminishes the high school experience. Yet, parents should make sure their teenagers understand that the academic choices they make in high school will play a role in their college prospects.

That’s because academics top the list (see chart on page 37) of the criteria that admission’s staffers use to make their decisions about who gets in and who doesn’t. Specifically, they’re looking to see the kinds of grades an applicant has and in what kinds of classes those grades were earned. Here’s what you need to know:

COURSEWORK

Heading into freshman year, parents should help teenagers—together with the guidance counselor—put together a schedule that’s right for them. While your state’s graduation requirements will dictate much of what your teenager will take in high school, there are still plenty of decisions to make.

“As you enter high school, you start to have a lot of choices about what kind of curriculum you are going to take,” notes Cecilia Castellano, vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University. “Are you going to take honors classes? Study a foreign language? Do a more technical track?”

Admissions staffers will look at what they call “strength of curriculum,” meaning how much an applicant challenged themselves in high school.

Throughout high school, your teenager should take classes that are appropriately challenging. A helpful rule of thumb: Earning a B in an advanced course with more stringent requirements is better from an admissions staffer’s perspective than an A in a too-easy or non-academic course.

How many advanced courses should a student take? That depends. If your teenager is capable of a full load of advanced classes, fine. But if that will make your teenager crash and burn, then try just one or two. Work to find that sweet spot of a strong GPA in classes that challenge your teenager.

SET REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

It can take time to adjust to high school, so don’t sweat it too much if your teenager’s first semester or year is a bust. In fact, colleges love to see students who “catch fire” and end strong, notes Terry McCue, a former high school counselor who now works in college admissions.

The opposite—starting out strong and petering out by junior year—will hurt your teenager’s candidacy, however. That’s why you want to be wary of overloading your student with too many advanced classes.

Be clear with your teenager about your academic expectations. But first be honest with yourself about what’s reasonable. Few students are capable of earning straight A’s in a schedule packed with AP, IB, or other advanced classes.

“Set expectations for grades that are realistic for your student and based on what they want to do,” recommends Castellano. “If you have a kid who says, ‘I want to be biology pre-med and I want to go to an Ivy League,’ that’s a very different schedule than for one who says, ‘I’m interested in getting an associate’s degree in nursing and maybe working for a few years before getting my bachelor’s.’”

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

If you’re like many parents, you’ve spent a lot of time shuttling your teenager from one extracurricular activity to another. But how important are extracurriculars in the admissions process?

That depends on the type of college your teenager plans to apply to.

“The extracurricular resume is only really important for a few schools,” notes Kris Hintz, founder of Position U 4 College in New Jersey. “But, I think a lot of parents have gleaned from the media that this applies to every college, and it doesn’t.”

In fact, according to the 2017 State of College Admissions by the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, eight percent of colleges surveyed said extracurriculars had “considerable importance” in the admissions process. About 36 percent said they had “moderate importance,” while the remaining 56-plus percent said they had “limited” to “no importance.”

Even at schools where extracurriculars matter a lot, there’s no reason to go overboard. Admissions staffers are looking for depth, not breadth.

“Those schools like to see some commitment, that the applicant is not flitting from one thing to another,” explains Lynn O’Shaughnessy, author of The College Solution. “For example, my daughter liked art and soccer, and that was enough.”

Also, there’s no “must-do” extracurricular that college looks for, so let your teenager pick, even if it’s offbeat, like bird watching. Notably, admissions officers say teenagers who’ve been pushed into the “right” activities tend to talk half-heartedly about them on their applications and in the interview.

How about students who have to work (or want to work) and can’t pursue extracurriculars? Not to worry. Colleges—even the most elite—value work experience as much as extracurriculars.

But there is one hard-and-fast rule about extracurriculars: They should not interfere with academics.

“Extracurriculars are not a back door into college,” Hintz notes. “If an extracurricular activity comes at the expense of grades, then you’re actually hurting your application, not helping.”
Sophomore year of ten includes two pre-tests: the PSAT (for the SAT) and the Pre-ACT (for the ACT). There is no need to prepare for this first round of tests. They don’t count, and no admissions staffer will ever see the results. However, they are helpful. “It gives an indication of how they will score on the real test,” explains Megan Dorsey, founder of the Houston-based College Prep. You’ll have an indication of what your teenager needs to work on, as well as a sense of whether to focus on the ACT or the SAT (colleges only require one).

During the fall of junior year, your teenager will take the PSAT for a second time. This second PSAT is another chance to practice for the SAT, but it’s also the qualifying exam for the National Merit Scholarship. Experts suggest that if your student scores within National Merit territory—the top 3 percent of test-takers in your state—the first time she takes the PSAT (sophomore year), it’s worth studying for this second, qualifying round. For starters, being a National Merit finalist (even a semi-finalist) raises your teenager to the top of the applicant pool—and it can also bring scholarships.

“The scholarships from National Merit are relatively small, around $2,500,” Dorsey explains. “But, there are many colleges and universities that have special scholarships set aside for any National Merit finalist that opts for their school.”

In the spring of junior year, most teenagers take the SAT or the ACT (or both) for the first time. The amount of preparation required depends on your teenager,” Dorsey says. “There are the teenagers you can hand a book, and they’re going to get it done themselves. Others may need more guidance.”

There are many prep classes: through a private tutor, a franchise like Sylvan, or even a free course at your local library. “At a minimum, every student should be familiar with the test,” says Dorsey. “Don’t go in cold, having paid $50, and put an official score on record. You can at least pick up the full-length practice test and do it on a Saturday morning at the kitchen table.”

Choose the ACT or SAT based on your teen’s success with the pre-test. Experts note that the ACT tends to be more coachable, but it’s important to be realistic about just how much you can improve a score, Dorsey says. “Most teenagers are never going to get a perfect score, but they can open up some more doors if they can score three or four points higher on the ACT or a couple hundred higher on the SAT.”

The good news: Your teenager can take these tests more than once. In fact, many applicants will take either the SAT or the ACT again during the fall of their senior year. Some colleges, typically the most elite, will want to see every score, while others will simply ask for your highest score.

By sophomore year, colleges want to see that students have gained their footing in high school. Things to focus on this year:

- Maintain a solid academic record (or get on track academically).
- Continue with one or two extracurricular activities (or find ones to start). Colleges like to see a few years of commitment to an activity.
- Expect admissions testing to officially begin. Your student will take the PSAT or the PLAN or both.
YOUR TEEN | JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018

11TH GRADE

Welcome to junior year, the heart of the admissions process. This is the most important—and stressful—year of your teenager’s high school career. Here’s what to expect:

Test scores on record. While tests taken during sophomore year are for you and your teenager’s eyes only, in junior year they count. Most juniors sit for the SAT or the ACT or both in the spring. Often, students will take their test a second time senior year.

Academics. Junior year is in many ways the most important year on your teenager’s transcript. Especially if your teenager applies to college early—deadlines are November of senior year—these grades will be a major focus of the admissions staff.

Start to build a college list. This is the year to start to determine which colleges are going to be the right fit for your teenager. Carefully selecting schools that match your teenager’s academic, social, and financial needs will be worth the effort. Part of this process should include campus visits.

The essay. At many high schools, students write their essays in English class. If that’s the case at your teenager’s school, lucky you. If not, your teen should wait no later than the summer before senior year to get started. Don’t rush this part of the application.

FACTORS IN ADMISSIONS DECISIONS

The National Association of College Admissions Counseling routinely polls college admissions staffers to find out what’s most important in their decision making. This list shows factors ranked by the percentage of colleges that say they’re “considerably important.”

Grades in College-Prep Courses 79%
Grades in All Courses 77%
Admissions Test Scores 54%
Strength of Curriculum 52%
Essay 19%
Counselor Recommendation 15%
Teacher Recommendation 11%
Extracurriculars 8%

Finding the Right College

Coming up with a realistic list of colleges to apply to is one of the most important steps in the process. But with so many institutions to pick from, how should families go about making a list? These four ideas will get you started.

SET YOUR CRITERIA

Would you be happy for your student to go to any college? Probably not. Most of us have some criteria for where our teenager will go to college. Aaron Greene, founder of Columbus, Ohio-based College Liftoff, recommends families focus on four key areas when helping their teenager decide where to apply:

1. Academics (Does it offer the major your teenager is interested in?)
2. Career development (How does the school help students in that major get jobs after graduation?)
3. Affordability (How much will it cost your family per year?)
4. Culture and fit (Does your student like it there?)

“Students need to do their research and not be afraid to ask tough questions, such as: What kind of internships are offered? What are the job placement statistics? What will it cost me? Is it strong in my anticipated major?” says Greene. “Don’t rely on a school’s reputation alone. A school may offer many majors but only really

EVALUATE SCHOOLS

Students and parents should approach the college search the same way they would approach buying a home: with a lot of in-depth research. Students tend to want to apply to schools they’ve heard of—or where their friends are applying. This is not enough of a reason to put a school on your list.

“Students need to do their research and not be afraid to ask tough questions, such as: What kind of internships are offered? What are the job placement statistics? What will it cost me? Is it strong in my anticipated major?” says Greene. “Don’t rely on a school’s reputation alone. A school may offer many majors but only really
excel in some of them.”

Once a family has decided what factors are most important, says Castellano, “then it’s a matter of finding the five to six schools that are have the features you’re looking for.”

There are many online resources that can help. CollegeBoard.org offers detailed overviews of thousands of U.S. institutions (four-year and two-year). CollegeScorecard.com is quick and helpful for understanding average costs and after-graduation salaries at every accredited college in the U.S. College websites are also a wealth of information, and sites like CollegeConfidential.com and Unigo.com can offer the inside scoop on social life and more.

KEEP RANKINGS IN CHECK
Many students and parents feel pressure to pick a school based on prestige and rankings. Bad idea, says Martha O’Connell, Director Emerita of Colleges that Change Lives. “We live in a brand-name society. Many parents want to ride around town with a certain college bumper sticker. But, choosing a college because of where it ranks on a list does not take into account who you are and who you want to become.”

Most importantly, those schools may not meet your family’s criteria, including affordability (many prestigious colleges do not offer merit aid) or majors (you can’t get an undergraduate degree in nursing at Harvard, for example).

COVER YOUR BASES
It’s helpful to organize your college list into at least two categories: safety schools and match schools. A safety school is one that you are confident your teenager will get into (check accepted scores and GPA on CollegeBoard.org). A match school is one that your student is likely to get into, but it’s not a sure thing. Some students will also want to apply to what’s called a reach school, which is a school that probably will not accept your student, but your student still wants to try.

Above all, remember to make sure at least one of the safety schools on your list is also a financial safety. That way, you can be guaranteed that your student will have an acceptance from a college you can afford.

11TH GRADE

THE CAMPUS VISIT

Visiting colleges can be helpful when trying to decide where to apply—or where to go once accepted. Here are our experts’ top recommendations for getting the most out of your campus visits:

Start early. It takes time to visit all the schools on your list (or enough of them). Plan on at least half a day per school, and book important on-campus opportunities well in advance. That includes interviews and information sessions, which tend to fill up during peak times, like spring break.

Go when school is in session. While it may be easier to do tours during the summer, it’s important to make sure your student experiences the campus during the school year, too. “If you go over the summer and like the school, schedule a visit during the academic year so you can experience the vibe when the students are there,” recommends Cecilia Castellano, vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University.

Your student can also visit campus after being admitted; many colleges offer admitted-student programs before the May 1 decision deadline—including overnights—to help students determine whether the school is right for them.

Don’t skip the information session. When you’re racing from one campus to another, it can be tempting to skip the information session. Don’t. Sure, these hour-long presentations can get boring—and repetitive—but they do provide valuable information.

Take notes. Tours can blend into one another. Have your teenager document her thoughts in real time. Also, pay attention to what the admissions officers say during the information session. For colleges that require a supplemental “Why this college?” essay, these talks can provide helpful insights.

Ask questions. Make a list of questions before you leave on your trip. In fact, Kelly Queijo, founder of SmartCollegeVisit.com, suggests asking the same questions on every tour for an apples-to-apples comparison.

Explore. The tour and information session provide a great overview, but to get a real feel for the campus, make time in your schedule to explore. “Walk around, have lunch in the dining hall, visit the bookstore, observe the students,” suggests Castellano.

Castellano also recommends students look for other opportunities while on campus, like visiting specific schools or departments within the university—such as schools of business or engineering, if that’s what your student is interested in.

Be sure you look beyond academics, too. Peruse the bulletin boards in the student centers for activities that appeal to your student. Check out the gym and other facilities that your teenager anticipates using on a regular basis.

Schedule an interview. These days, many colleges do not require applicants to have an interview, but that doesn’t mean your teenager shouldn’t sign up for one when it’s offered. An impressive interview can work in your teenager’s favor. These slots are handed out on a first-come, first-served basis—another reason to plan your trip well in advance. (Note: Some colleges do require interviews for consideration for merit aid.)

Parents, step back. Teenagers should take the lead during the application process, and that includes the campus visit. “Remember, this is your student’s journey, not yours,” says Robin Mamlet, the former dean of admissions at Swarthmore College and co-author of College Admission: From Application to Acceptance, Step by Step.

Have fun! Last, but hardly least, take some time during your trip to have fun with your teen. Go sightseeing or eat at a popular local restaurant. Not only will you get a feel for the area around campus, you’ll also be spending precious moments with your teenager.
Ace the Essay

For many teenagers, the most stressful part of the admissions process is the essay. And how do you impress when answering questions like, “Tell us how you learned from failure” or “Where do you see yourself in 20 years?” or, at one school, “So where is Waldo, really?” We asked the experts for top tips to share with your teenagers.

1. **Read nonfiction essays.** “College essays are very different than English assignments, where you have to analyze a play in the third person,” says Lisa K. Buchanan, a San Francisco-based essay advisor and writer. “They involve more intimacy.” She recommends high school seniors read a sampling of literary nonfiction essays before starting their own college essay. “Go to the library. Get an anthology of essays, and read the first opening paragraph for inspiration,” she says.

2. **Talk through your essay.** A good way of practicing this is talking through the essay at the dinner table. “Sometimes when you’re being spontaneous and exploring the topic, the things that come out are just wonderful,” says Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz, a college admissions counselor in La Jolla, California, and author of the book *Admission Possible*. “Parents can help teens get more focused as they’re speaking. At the end of the dinner, you can practically have the essay written.”

3. **Don’t be a bore.** When thinking about the voice of an essay, think about the qualities of your favorite conversation partners—what makes them so interesting to talk with—and adopt them. “In general, you tend to avoid the person who only talks about how great he is, or the person who, when asked about their vacation, gives you a list of every single thing they did,” Buchanan says. The same thing holds true for the voice of essays. “You want to show a little bit of vulnerability,” Buchanan adds.

4. **Share your solution.** In other words, they’re looking for examples of how your mind works: how you reacted in an adverse situation or how you solved a difficult problem. Everyone has these stories; the tricky parts are realizing you have them—and then telling them.

5. **Be yourself.** “The good thing is that admissions counselors aren’t looking for Hemingway-style prose or even extraordinary stories,” says Hansen Shaevitz. “They are looking for you to be yourself.”
Use proper grammar and punctuation throughout.
Most students know to be careful with the essay, but they should take care with everything in the application. It all counts, so make sure your student puts his best foot forward throughout.

Be accurate.
This is not the time to embellish your extracurriculars, scores, or any other aspect of your application. Check dates, be reasonable about how much time you really spent on activities outside of class, and be honest about who you are and what you’ve accomplished.

Understand what supplemental materials will be required.
Many schools require or recommend applicants submit additional essays and/or other supplementary materials (for example, an art portfolio or short answers to specific questions, like “What are your favorite books?”). Don’t wait to figure out if a school requires these supplements until the night before the application is due.

Pay attention to deadlines.
If your student misses the deadline, they’re out of luck, so pay close attention to those due dates. Send scores, transcripts, and recommendations well ahead of the deadline (to make sure they are there on time). Also worth noting: Financial aid deadlines are often different from application deadlines. Check a college’s website to make sure you have correct deadlines for everything.

What Happens When You Click Submit?

The big day has arrived. Your teenager has submitted their college applications, and it’s time to kick back and wait for the results. But for colleges across the country, the work has just begun. In the months following the deadline, admissions officers work round the clock to decide who gets accepted to next year’s freshman class. So, what happens behind those closed doors?

Not surprisingly, the process depends on the type of school. At regional public institutions, for example, decisions are based mostly on the academic record (transcript, GPA, and test scores). If you hit the numbers, you’re in.

But at more selective public and private institutions, the admissions process is more holistic. In addition to checking academic and test records, admissions staffers are reading essays and recommendations and considering extracurriculars and anything else an applicant has provided (like a portfolio or interview).

However, even at these institutions, academics are the most important part of the application. A wonderful essay or recommendation won’t get your teenager admitted if his academic record is well below an institution’s benchmarks.

Every application is read at least once—a process that takes, on average, 15 minutes. “From a parental perspective, there is a concern that their child won’t get their moment. In my experience, that’s not how it works. Every single student gets a fair evaluation,” notes Rick Bischoff, who currently serves as vice president for enrollment management at Case Western Reserve University.

Next, applications are triaged into those for immediate acceptance, those for rejection, and those requiring further consideration, explains Kris Hintz, owner of Position U 4 College, an admissions coaching service in New Jersey. Immediate acceptances tend to be students with “stellar grades, scores, essays, everything. They are way above the college’s benchmarks,” she adds.

Applications requiring further consideration will go either to a second reader, a committee, or some combination of both for a final decision. Most of the students still under consideration at this point are qualified to attend, but the admissions staff is not simply looking for qualified students. They’re trying to put together the optimal freshman class for next fall—a process as subjective as it sounds.
My high school didn’t start talking about college applications until late junior year, when it was almost too late. Building a portfolio, collecting letters of recommendation, and visiting schools takes a lot of time. Exploring your options can’t begin too soon.

In particular, I wish I’d learned earlier about scholarships—something you might not be focused on as much as high school grades, testing, and looking at colleges. If I could go back, I’d begin scholarship applications late sophomore year. There are scholarship niches for nearly every talent and demographic, each with extensive applications. Counselors advised that I wait until I was accepted into colleges, but when I began, I realized how many incredible opportunities I had already missed.

The Test Score Isn’t Everything

My Florida public school system made every test score feel like it was determining the fate of my college career. I was a straight-A student, but standardized testing was my downfall. Advisors stressed the importance of the SAT, so I wasted time and money retaking the test with no improvement.

The discouraging results motivated me to find another way to demonstrate my talents and intelligence. I found that many schools don’t require submission of test scores, instead looking at a comprehensive compilation of grades, portfolio, writing, and community service. Since testing wasn’t my best asset, I focused on other ways to show colleges my strengths.

Finding the Right Place

High school advisors never mentioned attending an out-of-state university—I had to take the initiative to find the right place and look outside the box.

Finding a school that matched my learning style was crucial. I asked colleges about project-based learning, working in the industry, hands-on learning, and how soon I could take classes in my major.

On-campus college information sessions made my top choice clear. I was able to discuss classes with professors, shadow students, and speak with the dean of the program. Visiting campuses is enjoyable, but information sessions give far more insight into the university.

Finding the right fit made all the difference in how much I enjoy class. At Parsons School of Design, I participate in small focused groups, creative discussions, and project-based assessments.

When I first arrived on campus, Parsons seemed overwhelming. Being far away from home and not knowing other students was hard, but it was the best choice and has allowed me to excel in a unique environment.

Stay Involved

As a teenager with a supportive and encouraging mother, I can’t emphasize enough the power a parent has in making the college application process manageable and exciting. Supporting your teen through this overwhelming decision and keeping an open mind will create an easier transition for both of you.

Lucelia Nelles is a sophomore at Parson’s School of Design studying strategic design and management. When she’s not working on her next project, she’s busy sampling gluten-free restaurants in New York City for her food blog, glutenfreegirlfriends.com.
No matter the age of your child, CollegeAdvantage is how forward-thinking parents make college doable. Use our online tools and calculators to build the 529 plan that suits your family’s needs. Start your tax-advantaged college savings plan today at CollegeAdvantage.com/YourTeen
The Surprising Ways You Can Spend a 529 Account

By Diana Simeon

For years, the Taylor family of Solon, Ohio, carefully socked away savings in 529 accounts for their two daughters’ college educations. But when it came time for their younger daughter to leave the nest, she decided not to go to college: Instead, she pursued a professional ballet career. Three years later, she’s still dancing. She’s also working as a barista and taking online college courses paid for by her employer, Starbucks. So, what about the 529 account?

Many parents worry that they won’t be able to save enough for college, but is it possible to have too much saved? What if a child decides not to go to college, or they earn a lot of scholarship money? Not to worry: It turns out that 529 plans are incredibly flexible.

TUITION AND (LOTS) MORE

Of course, 529 funds can be used for college tuition. But there are many other expenses that qualify, too.

“The short answer is you can pay for anything that is required by the college and included in their cost of attendance,” says Charlie Donaldson, founder of College Bound Coaching, which helps families with college funding.

Room and board, books, computers, and other supplies are all qualified expenses.

Parents can also use 529 accounts to pay for fees, which can be significant, says Timothy Gorrell, executive director of the Ohio Tuition Trust Authority, which manages Ohio’s 529 plan, CollegeAdvantage.

“There are mandatory fees a school will charge that all students, regardless of their course of study, will pay,” explains Gorrell. “But specific courses may have additional technology or resource fees associated with them that may not have been anticipated. These are all qualified expenses.”

For example, nursing students are required to pay fees associated with their clinical work—sometimes hundreds of additional dollars—and fees for specialized medical equipment. Other majors may require lab or other fees.

Additionally, 529 account funds can be used to cover the costs of living off campus, up to the amount the college charges for room and board. The expenses of studying abroad are also eligible, so long as the program is through a U.S.-accredited higher education institution.

NOT JUST FOR FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

Not sure what your kid will wind up doing? A 529 still offers flexibility. You can pay for more than just a traditional four-year college degree.

Take, for example, the Taylors’ young ballerina. Her 529 is paying for books and lab fees for the online university.

“You can use a 529 for trade school, a certificate program, community college, even graduate school,” says Gorrell. Whether it’s cosmetology or the culinary arts, a 529 can fund it, so long as the specific school or program accepts federal financial aid. The U.S. Department of Education website includes an extensive list of the programs and schools that accept federal financial aid.

There’s also no deadline for using the funds in a 529, so anything left over after college (or another program) can be used for post-graduate education, whether that’s graduate school or other training.

Lastly, you can use the money in a 529 to send your student to school in any state—you don’t have to live there or have your 529 plan based there, says Gorrell.

SWITCH BENEFICIARIES? NO PROBLEM

Consider this: Your oldest child gets a lot of merit aid and doesn’t need to use all the money in his 529 plan. Meanwhile, your youngest child gets no merit aid and doesn’t have enough money in her 529.

Solution? You can transfer funds from one 529 to another, whether that is a sibling or other qualifying relatives, like nieces, nephews, and even a parent, says Gorrell.

“I have actually seen a situation where a son ended up getting a lot of scholarship money,” recalls Donaldson. “The father changed the beneficiary to himself, and he went back to school.”

All those years of saving for college had paid off—with two educations instead of one.

Brought to you by Ohio Tuition Trust Authority, administrator of CollegeAdvantage, Ohio’s 529 College Savings Program. Helping families save for college for more than 25 years. Learn more at collegeadvantage.com.
When It’s More than

TEEN ANGST

Finding the Right Therapist

By Jaimie Seaton

Toward the end of his freshman year of high school, Jake began to experience severe anxiety. He had extreme test anxiety, which is common among teenagers. But he also had some atypical fears: He was so worried about being in a car accident that he wouldn’t sit in the front seat, and at the mall he feared the floor would collapse.

“At first, he came to me and said he was worrying and having thoughts that sometimes kept him up at night,” says Jake’s mother, Kim. She (correctly) thought it was anxiety and told him that she could take him to someone who could help him learn how to manage it, but he wasn’t ready.

“He said he wanted to try to manage it on his own and would let me know if that changed. Sure enough, a couple of months later, he came to me and said, ‘I think it’s time for me to see someone about my anxiety.’”

Kim found a psychologist, and Jake has been in treatment for about 14 months. Because he made the decision, Kim and her husband didn’t worry about whether it was time to seek professional help. Kim also felt comfortable reaching out to friends for a referral, in part because she had seen a therapist in the past. But for some parents, the whole idea is daunting and they don’t know where to start.

Is It Time?

When parents aren’t sure if their child needs help, they may want to check in with other people who care about their teen.

“If the parent is seeing problems or having concerns, there is a good chance that other people are too: teachers or other relatives, perhaps,” says Tim DiGiacomo, a clinical psychologist and the Clinical Director at
Mountain Valley Treatment Center, a residential facility in New Hampshire that treats children and teens with severe anxiety disorders.

If you are apprehensive about taking the next step, DiGiacomo advises exploring that emotion.

“If a parent can figure out where their own reluctance or concerns are, they can use that information to figure out who and what kind of therapy they want for their teen,” says DiGiacomo, adding that it’s important for parents to keep an open mind.

Perhaps the difficulty is not so much a mental health issue, but typical developmental hurdles or a parent-teen relationship issue. Psychologists can sometimes see the parent alone first to help tease out the nature of the concern.

Where to Start
Your teen’s school may be a resource in finding help. School counselors who know your teen often have good relationships with therapists in the community, so they may be in a good position to make a match. Pediatricians can also refer your family to trusted providers.

Sarah Stearns, a pediatric psychologist at Deer Creek Psychological Associates in Hanover, New Hampshire, advocates interviewing potential therapists. In the case of teen mental health issues, ask about evidence-based treatment—treatment that has research-demonstrated outcomes—such as cognitive behavior therapy. CBT is a short-term practical approach to problem-solving and is used to change patterns of thinking or behavior.

Whether you choose a psychologist with a doctorate or a therapist with a master’s level certification is a personal choice. Stearns says it’s important that the therapist is either licensed or practicing under the supervision of someone who is licensed.

A therapist might recommend a medical evaluation in addition to therapy, in which case a psychiatrist (who is a medical doctor, unlike a psychologist) may be called in. Sometimes the therapist recommends this because they suspect that medication might help the teen. The family doctor can also prescribe medication.

Prioritize Mental Health
It can be intimidating for both parents and teens to take the step of seeking counseling. But, just as we would go to the dentist for a teen’s cavity, we can help them care for their mental health, too. Like a cavity, mental illness can get worse (and hurt like heck!) without proper attention, but it’s immensely treatable with the right intervention.

Cleveland Play House has offered educational programming as varied as the stories on its stages. Alumni include Academy Award®-winner Paul Newman, Academy Award®- and Tony Award®-winner Joel Grey, and Toy Story 3 Director Lee Unkrich, among many other successful film and theatre talents.

CPH Theatre Academy has classes for working adult professionals, preschool children with big imaginations, and everyone in between. Faculty from Tony-Award-recipient Cleveland Play House will excite creative potential and nurture your passion for live theatre!
Anonymous

I am breathing heavily. I feel defeated, as bursts of what feels like vomit slip up and down my closed throat. My stomach is turned upside down and in knots. My last breath of air quickly escapes my lips with a quick, pitiful huff.

“I can’t breathe!”
“Think I may be dying!”
“What’s going to happen to me?!”
“Why am I feeling like this?!”

These voices swirl around my head as the thought of death hovers over my small 9-year-old body.

I hold my stomach and race to the nurse’s office with determination. I run through the halls, kids glaring at me as I zoom past.

Suddenly, I notice the nurse’s office doors and rush through.

“I—I need to call my mom!” I shout.

The thin nurse with short and white wispy hair shoots me down with a fierce look of, “I don’t give a crap.”

“What’s your name!?” she bellows. I proceed to tell her, as she rolls her eyes and asks me what’s wrong.

“I’m really not sure, I just feel really sick and my stomach really hurts! I just really need to call my mom please!” I cry, practically begging the nurse to let me speak to my mother.

“Fine,” she says, grabbing the phone harshly. She dials the number and hands me the phone.

“I hear the ringer, echoing in and out of the phone, as the image of death still wraps itself around me. My throat is suddenly closed again, and I feel as if I truly cannot breathe.

“Pick up mom! Please, please!” I think to myself.

When I hear no voice on the other end, my throat closes even more, and that same sickening feeling clouds around me—until suddenly, I hear the angelic voice of my mother through the other line, and all of my anxiety floats away.

This was about five years ago, and it was my very first panic attack. I didn’t know it at the time, but that’s really all it was. Not the flu. Not a sickness. And definitely not death!

Just anxiety. And that’s how I’ve learned to look at it now! Nothing major. I don’t get panic attacks anymore, but I do sometimes feel anxious and stressed. When that happens, I watch a funny episode of a TV show and get a good cuddle from my dogs.

I don’t think I need to go back to therapy. Overall, I think I’ve really learned to cope with my anxiety—and despite what my mom says about my panic attacks, I think I’m just experiencing regular high school stress.

Anonymous

My son was born anxious. Perhaps it’s because his birth was an emergency C-section; perhaps it’s because I am anxious. It could be because my sister died unexpectedly while I was pregnant with him, and I went into deep mourning. Or it could be bad luck.

Whatever the cause, his intensity was apparent to me in the first few days of his life. When he nursed, he would drink ferociously while reaching up with his hand to yank his hair. I’d gently uncurl his fingers, but he would immediately go back to pulling his blond locks as he gulped his milk.

When he was a young boy, he often missed the school bus due to an upset stomach. Once he was at school, he seemed to be okay, but at home he was often a nervous wreck. He exhibited signs of obsessive orderliness early on, insisting that I throw his socks in his hamper when I put him to bed rather than leave them on the floor overnight.

When he was 9, he didn’t want to be away from me, ever. I sat courtside during tennis lessons, and if I rose to go to the bathroom he’d get a panicked look on his face. That same year, my husband left me, and shock waves rippled through our family. My daughter became angry; my son became more anxious.

With therapy, he was able to overcome some of his OCD and separation anxiety. I gently pushed him to walk away from me in stores, or go to sleepovers at friends’ houses. He did get better, but the anxiety never fully subsided.

Now 14 and a freshman in high school, he is much more independent. He has no problem going out on his own, and he volunteers in the community and has a nice group of friends. But he is still anxious about making decisions or making a mistake. He catastrophizes every event, always expecting the worst. He can become very upset in a matter of seconds, and being reminded of his breathing exercises often makes him more anxious.
I want him to see a therapist again, but he refuses. I understand this is part of the anxiety. Acknowledging it makes it worse, but the only way to treat it is to discuss it, so it’s a vicious cycle. I have four more years to get him ready to leave me. I just want to him to be happy.

EXPERT

Angela Neal-Barnett, Ph.D.

What’s going on with this teen? Part of what he’s feeling (and Mom is seeing) is his anxiety, and part of it is being 14 years old. Transitioning to high school is a stressful time, and anxiety can become heightened. Often, there is a need for extra support during this transition. Teens with a history of anxiety can benefit from in-person booster sessions, but like our high school freshman here, many are reluctant to go back into therapy.

Thanks to technology, an online intervention or app can deliver booster sessions or support. Here are two free apps that I recommend:

**Mindshift** is an app specially designed for teenagers. It functions as a portable coach for the anxious teen wherever they go, with specific tools to address everything from perfectionism to sleep to feelings of panic.

**Breathe2Relax** offers a portable hands-on diaphragmatic breathing exercise. Deep breathing appears to help our freshman, but being reminded to breathe makes him more anxious. Being in control of his breathing by using the app may help him be more willing to take this step.

Both apps are evidence-based and have undergone rigorous testing.

If these aren’t a fit, there are dozens more apps for teen anxiety. I also recommend a website with great information and videos, www.anxietybc.com. The most important thing is that Mom and son choose an app or other approach that meets his needs.

In this case, I recommend apps because they are so easy for teenagers to use. A teen tapping away on his phone is the most natural sight in the world. No one will know he is using it to be proactive in anxiety-provoking situations. (Of course, he can’t use his phone if anxiety crops up in class, so he should also be open to using his breathing exercises—sans app—as a coping mechanism.)

Mobile apps do not necessarily work for all anxious teens. Because our high school freshman and his mom don’t agree, they may consider a two-week trial run with the app of his choice.

After that time, they should have an open and honest discussion about the app and how it is working—and about his anxiety. Then, the mother and son can make a decision together about the next step.

Angela Neal-Barnett, Ph.D is a professor of Psychological Sciences and the director of the Program for Research on Anxiety Disorders among African Americans at Kent State University. She is the author of Soothe Your Nerves: The Black Woman’s Guide to Understanding and Overcoming Anxiety, Panic and Fear.
ASK THE COUNSELOR: Marijuana Edibles

Sometimes a cookie is not just a cookie. Now that marijuana is legal for either medical or recreational use in more than half the United States, edibles are more accessible than ever. What should you know about edibles to protect your tweens and teens from accidental exposure? Your Teen spoke with Joelle Jacobson, neurofeedback clinician at the Betty Ford Center in West Los Angeles, California, for guidance.

What are edibles?
Edibles are anything we can eat that is infused with marijuana. They come in many different forms and can often be impossible to distinguish from regular sweets. Edibles can be baked goods—such as a cookie, cake, or brownie—as well as candy, like chocolate bars, suckers, gummy bears, or chewy candies, along with other snacks like pretzels and nuts. There can also be marijuana-infused drinks that look like soda or lemonade.
How are kids getting access to edibles?
If you live in a state where marijuana is legal for recreational use, parents may have purchased it legally. If it is not stored in a secure location, curious tweens and teens looking to experiment may find it, or children may happen upon it accidentally. We know that the average age of experimentation starts at 12. Kids can also buy edibles other ways: from an adult who has a medical marijuana card, from a peer taking it from their own home, from an illegal dealer.

How can kids distinguish an edible from regular baked goods?
Legal edibles are supposed to come in packaging that has the universal marijuana symbol on it. If it is out of the packaging and just sitting on the kitchen counter, however, then it can be impossible for a child to distinguish it from a regular snack.

What are the safety concerns of edibles for kids and adolescents?
There are many concerns. First, the dosage amount of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) listed on the packaging of an edible is the recommended adult serving. An adult serving may be a bite of a cookie, or a square of chocolate bar, but a child might not think anything of eating two whole cookies or a handful of gummy bears in one sitting. One gummy bear has the same THC level as one marijuana joint. If a child eats more than the recommended serving for an adult, they are at risk of ending up in the emergency room with serious toxicity, including dizziness, paranoia, anxiety, hallucinations, difficulty breathing, panic attacks, and potentially an acute psychotic episode if there is a genetic predisposition to mental illness.

The other significant concern is the cross-interaction of cannabis with other prescription and over-the-counter medications.

How does ingesting marijuana differ from smoking it?
The biggest difference is the delayed effect, compared to the more immediate effect of smoking or vaping. With edibles, depending on your metabolism or when you’ve eaten last, it can take one to four hours to feel the full effect. This is a problem with tweens and teenagers who may be starting to experiment and think, “I don’t feel anything” and eat more. It’s also a problem for parents recognizing toxicity in young kids who may have eaten an edible accidentally.

If that delayed effect happens hours later when an athlete is going onto the field for a game or when a teen is getting into a car to drive, this creates a dangerous situation not only for the teen, but perhaps for others as well.

How do we prevent our kids from accidental exposure to edibles?
In states where marijuana is legal, there are laws that require products containing marijuana to have clear medical marijuana labeling with serving sizes, a list of warnings, and child-resistant packaging. Parents need to treat edible marijuana products like dangerous prescription drugs. Keep them in their original packaging, in locked containers, hidden, and out of reach of their children.

Interview by Jane Parent
TWEEN TALK

Shy, Socially Anxious, or Introverted?
Know the Difference So You Can Help

By Mary Helen Berg

Does your middle schooler:

(1) Prefer pizza night with a few friends to a raucous dance party?
(2) Take time to warm up in social settings?
(3) Avoid gatherings altogether because they feel they don’t belong, and that others will think they look and act dumb?

If any of this sounds familiar, it’s not only because your tween is at an awkward age where their body is changing and friends are more important than breathing. Your tween also could be an introvert (1 above), shy (2), or socially anxious (3).

As parents, we sometimes use these three terms interchangeably, but experts say they aren’t the same. If you can recognize the difference, you’ll be better equipped to help your middle schooler develop healthy, effective tools to negotiate their social and academic life.

When Your Kid is Introverted
For introverts, middle school is especially challenging because new social demands conflict with their reserved nature and need for downtime, writes author Susan Cain in her bestseller, Quiet.

“The middle and high school years are the most difficult times to be introverted because when hundreds of kids are crammed together in a single building, it can feel as if the only way to gain respect and friendship is through vivacity and visibility.” Cain writes.

Introverts generally prefer a small circle of friends and are content with a quieter style at school, says Lynne Siqueland, a clinical psychologist at the Children’s and
Don’t push your shy child to jump in at social gatherings. Give them time to warm up.

Adult Center for OCD and Anxiety in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania.

Shyness Is Not Social Anxiety
While introversion is a fairly stable personality trait, shyness may be circumstantial. Tweens may not always exhibit shyness, but may hang back when they join a gathering or hesitate to participate in class.

Social Anxiety
But when a tween is socially anxious, the anxiety interferes with daily life and keeps them from interacting, even if they want to. They will cut class to avoid giving a presentation or won’t go to a party because they’re afraid they will somehow be embarrassed, says Kathy HoganBruen, group therapy program director at the Ross Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders in Washington, D.C.

“It’s all really a matter of degrees in trying to define these things,” HoganBruen says. “Social anxiety becomes a disorder depending on how much distress a person feels and how much impairment they experience.”

About half of all teens describe themselves as shy, according to a national study of 10,000 teens sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health. But at around age 13, social anxiety, a disorder that disrupts normal behavior, emerges in 12 percent of shy teens and in five percent of teens who don’t think of themselves as shy.

Social anxiety grows when tweens continue to avoid situations that make them nervous, says Siqueland, who has treated hundreds of tweens and adolescents over the past 20 years. Over time, untreated social anxiety puts people at a higher risk for serious problems such as depression and substance abuse.

Moving Forward
Cognitive behavioral therapy can ease social anxiety, especially when it is significant, but parents can also help their tweens by gently guiding them to confront social discomfort, says HoganBruen.

“It doesn’t take a lot to get over social anxiety,” adds Siqueland. “It’s about facing fear, and it gets better pretty easily if you start to face it. Know that kids can feel better and happier relatively quickly.”

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

DON’T

• Don’t call your tween “shy.” If a tween is prone to avoidance, this label gives them an excuse not to take risks. You can explain that “shy” is a feeling that happens sometimes, not a permanent personality trait.

• Don’t push your shy child to jump in at social gatherings. Give them time to warm up.

• Don’t always expect your socially anxious middle schooler to coordinate events on their own. Invite a family over to dinner to facilitate some low-stress socializing.

DO

• Encourage downtime for introverts who need to recharge after school. They may do better with fewer extracurricular activities than an extrovert who craves more company and external stimulation.

• Use incentives to expose your shy or socially anxious tween to challenging situations. If they want ice cream, you can insist that they go into the shop alone to order for themselves. If that’s too challenging, start with easier tasks first, like ordering at a restaurant when you are at the table with them.

• Support use of social media to network with friends (but as a supplement to in-person socializing, not a replacement).

• Offer to stay (out of sight, of course!) at a party and chat with the host parents while your shy or socially anxious tween settles in.

• Work with teachers to increase class participation. Perhaps ask them not to call on your shy student for the first month and then slowly raise expectations.
Tech Talk

By Sandra Gordon

Prepare Now to Cut the Digital Cord Before College

After their 19-year-old daughter, Marie, left for college an hour away from their Minneapolis home, Mary and Ed began tracking her.

Five months into Marie’s first year at college, her parents found out that she had blown through $2,000 in high school graduation money and lied about it. That’s when they began monitoring Marie’s funds through her linked online bank account.

“Marie doesn’t know the value of a dollar,” Mary says. “We call or text her when we think she’s spending too much money.”

Ed and Mary also monitor Marie through the Find My Friends app on their iPhones. They require Marie to have the app on at all times. “I can see where Marie is, and the app is pretty accurate,” Mary says.

“It’s a crazy world and she’s a young girl who can get into trouble, so we have to be hyper-focused on her.”

College is for Separating

Experts, however, say this kind of connection isn’t healthy. College is a time when teens—now young adults—should be emotionally and psychologically separating from their family, says Neil D. Brown, a family therapist in Santa Cruz, California and author of Ending the Parent-Teen Control Battle.
“Electronically monitoring teens in college isn’t healthy for anyone,” Brown says. “It can send the disempowering message that ‘We don’t trust you. You can’t do it on your own. You can’t handle this.’ If we don’t let teens develop their own identity, they’re going to feel smothered and controlled.” Brown also cautions that these kinds of limits on growing independence can foster oppositional behavior or anxiety symptoms.

It’s one thing to monitor teens when they’re in high school and living under your roof. You might, for example, have them text “home” when they get home after you’ve gone to bed. It’s quite another to continue monitoring after they’ve flown the nest, says Brown.

To ease the transition to independence, start giving your teen more autonomy and responsibility in middle and high school. That way, they will be more capable and feel more confident when they head off to college, and you’ll worry less.

**How to Prepare Your Teen**

Giving teens more independence and responsibilities at home will help to build your trust when your teen does leave home. Plus, your teen will have more confidence and ability to live independently.

“Your job as a parent is to work your way out of a job,” says Vicki Panaccione, Ph.D., a psychologist and founder of the Better Parenting Institute in Melbourne, Florida. She recommends instilling independence by having pre-college teens practice the everyday tasks they’ll need in a dorm situation, such as:

- Preparing meals
- Doing laundry, including washing their own sheets
- Light housecleaning
- Buying their own toiletries
- Filling the car with gas
- Sewing on a button
- Managing their spending money and bank account

Now is also the time to help your teen learn how to safely navigate potentially dangerous situations that may come with college, such as party culture.

“Have conversations with your teen such as, ‘What will you do if you go to a college party and people want you to drink?’” Panaccione says. They’ll no longer have the high school excuse of, “My mom will kill me if she smells it on my breath,” nor will they be able to text you to get out of a party gone bad.

With preparation, by the time college rolls around, you can trust that your teen is ready for more autonomy. There will still be missteps: They will oversleep and miss class. They won’t study and will get a bad grade. They might gain the freshman 15. They might blow their budget.

“Everybody makes mistakes,” Panaccione says. “But it’s how teens learn and grow. It’s part of the college experience.”

Electronic monitoring isn’t, however, a healthy part of that experience. Lay the groundwork with younger teens now to let go later.

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On Harlem’s 145th Street, teenage best friends Darius and Twig dream of a world beyond the confines of their daily lives. Darius is a writer, whose latest story might be published in a magazine—if only he can keep his alter ego, a fierce falcon, in check. And Twig is a runner, whose speed and endurance might bring him a scholarship—if only he can impress college scouts at an upcoming meet. But with Darius’s mother barely scraping by, pressure from Twig’s uncle to give up racing, and bullies Midnight and Tall Boy constantly on their case, these true-blue allies may not truly be free to use their gifts.

Street-smart and suspenseful, playful and profound, Darius & Twig is ultimately the story of two young men who must overcome obstacles by finding the best within themselves. *(Please note: This play includes choreographed staged violence and a prop gun.)*
Making A Dream Vacation Happen

Money-saving tips can keep travel within reach

By Sharon Van Epps

Our family loves to travel. The everyday grind of work, school, and sports limits our time together, and vacationing allows us to reconnect and make memories. At 14, 15, and 16, my kids now possess the maturity and stamina to go anywhere on the planet, but with kiddie discounts a thing of the past, getting there isn’t cheap. Besides the obvious ways to save—camping trips and staycations are classics—how can families indulge their wanderlust without going broke?

Five years ago, Karen Dawkins of Clayton, North Carolina, pulled off the seemingly impossible: a week in Paris for her family of five for just $7,000. When friends started asking for advice, Dawkins launched a blog, “Family Travels on a Budget,” and a travel guru was born.

“We make vacation part of our budget, just like retirement and college,” Dawkins says. “For the Paris trip, which cost more than our allocated budget line item, we ate lots of beans and rice to cut back on groceries and added more to the vacation budget.”

The family took the same budget borrowing approach to the holidays: At Christmas that year, they stuck to Paris-themed gifts, like a guide to the city’s museums—a tactic that not only saved money, but also heightened everyone’s anticipation for the trip.

Dawkins is relentless in her pursuit of bargains. She relies on the websites Momondo
and Scott’s Cheap Flights for airfares, uses Trivago for hotels, and turns to Booking.com for vacation home rentals. She’s also a fan of travel rewards programs. (Earning points with credit card purchases can also help, provided you don’t carry a balance.)

Limiting yourself to one or two carefully chosen loyalty programs will help accrue rewards, Dawkins says, and she should know: She once booked a seven-day Caribbean cruise for her entire family with points. Out-of-pocket costs for that trip—including airfare to the port, excursions, and gratuities—totaled less than $900.

Dawkins’ money-saving example is inspiring, but what if a hectic schedule allows little time for bargain hunting? Try getting your teen involved in the research. Making it a family project gets more brains working on cutting costs. Your teens also learn about smart shopping, and they’ll have more buy-in into the final itinerary. Kim Flodin, a New York mother of three, always asks her daughters to find the best local street food and hole-in-the-wall gems at their destination.

Enlisting the help of a travel agent may also save time and money, particularly for complicated itineraries. Rubingh is the mother of two teenage boys, and she acknowledges the challenges of scheduling trips around high school classes and activities. School breaks may be the easiest time to get away, she admits, but not the most affordable. You’ll pay more for traveling during the winter recess, plus you’ll face maximum crowds at popular attractions like Disney.

To get the best deals, Rubingh recommends vacationing at the start or end of your teen’s summer break, when other schools may be in session. Whenever possible, she says, “avoid traveling Saturday to Saturday. If kids can miss just one day of school to fly home on a Monday, the savings will be substantial.”

Of course, family trips don’t need to be elaborate to be special. I’ve discovered that even the simplest weekend getaways provide an opportunity to bond with my teens and even get them talking. Spending time together, sharing new experiences, and taking a break from the everyday grind is what family travel is all about, no matter where you go. ■
Ryan Parris started wearing contact lenses at just 10 years old. He was an active athlete, and keeping tabs on his sports goggles was cumbersome. “I worried a little bit about his lens care in the beginning,” says Jenny Parris, Ryan’s mom. “I am sure he would say I nagged him, but my biggest concern was if he washed his hands properly before putting his contacts in or taking them out.”

Her worries eased with time, however. “I knew he was using his cleaning solution, and his eyes were healthy except for some minor irritation now and then,” she recalls.

**A Surprising Diagnosis**

Fast forward to college. In November 2015, Ryan was a freshman playing football for the University of Alabama when he suddenly experienced severe pain and irritation in his left eye. His condition quickly worsened, and a doctor diagnosed him with acanthamoeba keratitis (AK). The rare and debilitating condition is caused by microscopic amoeba found in water—oceans, lakes, swimming pools, even tap water—that infect the cornea of the eye.

Ryan contracted the disease by rinsing his lenses under the bathroom faucet when he ran out of solution.

In the United States, most people diagnosed with AK are contact lens wearers. When the parasite gets into the eye, it slides under the lens and feeds on bacteria on the lens or cornea. The lens can trap the organism on the eye, reducing the opportunity to excrete it through tears. The parasite then embeds itself into the corneal tissue and begins to reproduce, often at alarmingly fast rates.

AK is rare, but it’s not a minor concern. Unlike more typical infections, it can last for weeks to months, says Dr. Janet Lee, a board-certified ophthalmologist with the Wheaton Eye Clinic in Wheaton, Illinois. “In the most severe cases, this infection can result in permanent vision loss.”

**How It Happens**

Doctors do not know why some people contract AK and others do not. The common denominator is exposure through water sources while wearing lenses; usually through swimming or showering, rinsing or storing lenses in tap water, or even handling lenses with wet hands. Poor contact lens hygiene, such as failing to disinfect lenses properly; causing bacteria to accumulate; or failing to change the case regularly, also increase the risk of infection.

By the teen years, most parents have gotten used to handing over hygiene responsibilities like tooth brushing and showering, but teens may still need parent oversight when it comes to lens care. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control found that 85 percent of teens who wear contact lenses are putting themselves at risk for infection with one or more poor hygiene habits.

“We encourage parents to make sure their kids and teens go to yearly eye doctor appointments,” says Dr. Jennifer Cope, medical officer at the CDC. “They should encourage their kids and teens to change their lenses and cases regularly, avoid sleeping or napping in their lenses, and avoid showering or swimming in their lenses.”

Additionally, if you are concerned that your child may not take lens care seriously, consider using daily lenses. This eliminates the cleaning step and simplifies the care process.

There are currently no medications specifically approved for the treatment of AK, but doctors have found success with “off-script” pharmaceuticals approved for other conditions. Most doctors use a combination of various antiseptic drops proven to kill the amoebas and create an inhospitable environment—as if shocking a pool with a large amount of chlorine. In the beginning, drops are used hourly, even through the night, which can be an exhausting experience.

Ryan has a scar directly over his pupil that impedes his vision, and he will need additional surgery to restore his sight completely.

His mom’s last words of advice: “Take contact lens care seriously, and never use any excuse to justify using tap water as a replacement for contact solution. There is too much risk involved.”

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Gross! The Eye Disease You’ve Never Heard Of**

By Whitney Fleming

Educate teens about the dangers of mixing water and contact lenses.
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Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District
At the age of 21, Wanda Durant was raising two boys on her own in Cheverly, Maryland, and trying to instill in them a sense of purpose and drive. Fast forward 30 years, and she now gets to watch her son Kevin earn championships with the Golden State Warriors and MVP titles in the NBA.

**As a young single mother of two boys, who did you look to for parenting inspiration?**
Initially the foundation of my parenting style started from my mom and my grandparents and the women in my family. One of the things they really instilled in me was to sacrifice for your family. To provide and protect your family at all costs. To do whatever it takes to ensure a stable home environment for them.

**How did you build on that foundation with your sons?**
When I started my own home, one of the things I realized was that my mom never followed her dreams, and therefore she never taught me how to follow my dreams. I didn’t know what it was I wanted to be or do. So, I decided for my children that I was going to teach them and decide what I wanted for them based on their characteristics and personality, whatever they were proficient in.

My oldest son loved literature, Kevin loved science, and they both loved basketball. I made faith important—that was our number one focal point in our home. That is a strong part of our foundation and who we are as a family.

I began to teach them how to set goals academically. For example, if they wanted to be an honor roll student, what that would look like for them. And we developed a plan for them to be successful and give them something to strive for. I developed a plan for the men I wanted my sons to grow into. I set out to develop that plan because I regretted that I didn’t have that plan for myself.

**How did you manage to do this all by yourself?**
There was a community of people who I surrounded myself and my sons with. We had my extended family, and the mentors and employees of the rec center my sons visited all the time. I wanted people who would help me carry out the plan and strategy that I had for my sons. It wasn’t just me. We had a lot of help.
it was not easy; there were a lot of challenges throughout the process.

Was it challenging raising a son who was so talented and maybe got more attention from his peers? There was always the possibility of being more prideful than one should be. That was always at the forefront with regards to him playing basketball. His coach and I kept him working at the skill of basketball versus playing basketball. We worked and worked so there wasn’t a lot of time for celebration. I feel that humility is one of the prizes of life.

Were there challenges for Kevin as a six-foot-tall kid in middle school? He was teased for being tall. One of the things I did was talk to his teacher in elementary school and I asked her to make the lines from the tallest to the shortest sometimes so that my son would know that he didn’t always have to be in the back. Sometimes children internalize things in a very peculiar way.

What was it like raising your son Anthony amidst the attention Kevin was receiving? While Kevin was getting attention in the basketball world, both he and Tony played basketball.

It was imperative that I recognize Tony and his successes along the way. The community didn’t always recognize him other than being Kevin’s brother. But I recognized his talents.

He was very successful. He went off to military school when he was 15 years old. He graduated third in military command and top 10 in his class. He is an entrepreneur businessman and has done really well for himself.

I am really proud of both of them. They are very close and work together now. Neither is married or has children yet. I am not too happy about that because I am ready for two daughters and then grandchildren.

Interview by Susan Borison
Call Me Maybe

By Rebecca Meiser

Your child’s phone etiquette and skills may need a boost.

Every year, when it comes time to think about phone plans, Michelle, the mother of 14-year-old Jonah, can’t bring herself to cancel her landline. She knows it’s not necessary—at this point most of her friends only have cellphones—but she worries what kind of communication skills Jonah will absorb if he never has to pick up or make a call on a shared line.

Today’s teens rarely call a house phone and say hello to their friend’s parent before asking for their friend, nor do they have to take phone messages for others in the family. “People have a harder time interpreting meaning when they are shown the written word.”

The language teenagers use while texting significantly differs from spoken language. “If you are communicating via text, it’s like shorthand verse,” explains Alex J Packer, Ph.D., a psychologist and author of the book How Rude!: The Teen Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out. “It has its own specialized language and even spelling.”

Phone calls follow a general format—introductions, content, conclusion—but texts have no real structure. “It’s sort of an eternal conversation,” says Senning.

Overreliance on texting can leave teens fumbling when they need to physically ask someone, like a teacher or a car mechanic, for help in real life. “Sometimes, they are not even sure how to start the conversation,” Packer adds.

While texting is convenient, parents can also help teens develop phone skills they may need in their personal or professional life.

“Practice with them,” Senning suggests. “Give them a call yourself. It doesn’t have to be as explicit as, ‘This is your phone etiquette learning time.’”

Parents can set standards and guidelines for when they expect teens to call—rather than text—with information. “If they are asking to change the time they want to come home at night, for instance—tell them that first they need to call you to discuss it and explain why they are going to be late,” Senning says. It’s the same sort of courtesy any future employer would expect.

6 MUST-HAVE PHONE SKILLS

1. Open the conversation with a greeting when calling someone who is not already a close acquaintance. Then immediately identify yourself, so the recipient knows who they are talking to.

2. It’s polite to let the recipient know if your phone is on speaker.

3. Make sure you write down the name of the person and the best way to reach them, as well as the message. Remember to actually give the person the message!

4. If leaving a message for someone, identify yourself and the best way to reach you right at the start of the message, follow up with the content, and then leave contact info again. “A lot of people will say the thing they are thinking, then leave their contact information only at the end,” says Senning. “But if the person is not ready, they have to listen to the whole message again to get to that number, which can be a pain.”

5. Smile before you dial. Studies show people can hear the smile in your voice.

6. Speak clearly and in complete sentences. Make sure you are holding the phone close enough to your mouth so the listener can clearly hear what you are saying.
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Not Finished Yet

By Bonnie Jean Feldkamp

“Mom!”

My daughter’s shriek from inside the bathroom stall echoed against the standard-issue gas station tile. We’d just made an ordinary pit stop on our drive home, but now I froze mid hand-wash.

She swung open the stall door and pointed to the toilet. Tears trickled from beneath the hand clamped over her eyes. My eyes shifted to where she pointed. It all seemed a bit melodramatic. Did I have to look? Couldn’t she just tell me? No. She was speechless.

My brain latched onto any probable explanation. Was there a dead mouse in the toilet? Had my daughter dropped her cellphone into a mess and she expected me to fish it out?

I looked to her one more time for help. Her nose slightly upturned. This was all beneath her.

I grimaced, sure I’d find her phone swimming in a pool of nastiness. I leaned over to peek inside.

Blood. I looked at my 12-year-old. “Ah, honey,” I said and pulled her to me. “You started your period.”

“I don’t want it!” she wailed.

I bought supplies and delivered them to her in the bathroom. In the car, I gave unsolicited advice on hygiene. She stared over to peek inside.

“Do you have questions?” I asked.

“No.” Her gaze fixed on the scenery.

“What’s for dinner?” my husband asked.

“Ah, honey,” I said and pulled her to my side. “You’ll always have me to take care of,” he beamed.

“Don’t get discouraged if it takes a while,” my OB-GYN had said.

If we got lucky, I’d officially be an “older mom.” But as an older couple, we were also more financially secure—and after creating a family from two single-parent homes, we knew this challenge was one we could handle with love and grace.

“You’ll always have me to take care of,” he beamed.

I sighed for a few days. My husband, on the other hand, saw this new development as the light at the end of the tunnel. “We’re so close,” he’d say. “We’re almost done!”

“We’re parents,” I said. “We’re never done.”

He sighed and then admitted that he, too, missed hearing little giggles and patterning feet in the house. We had discussed one more child, but life and other circumstances always got in the way. Our youngest hitting puberty seemed to shake the sand in the glass. Time was running out.

“Does it have to be now?” my husband asked.

“No, but soon.”

We decided to let our oldest finish high school and our youngest get through middle school without the added stress of a pregnant mom in the house.

It was the first time I had ever planned for a child so carefully. Our older two, who both lived with us full time, were both born from previous marriages—our eldest from his and our middle schooler from mine.

Though we never thought of them in terms of “his” and “hers,” my husband and I had never experienced being new parents together. The process brought new joy in our relationship. We chuckled about my going off birth control, joking that we had “pulled the goalie.” Urine stick ovulation tests—a new concept for us both—felt like practice runs for the pregnancy tests we were hoping to take.

“Don’t get discouraged if it takes a while,” my OB-GYN had said.

If we got lucky, I’d officially be an “older mom.” But as an older couple, we were also more financially secure—and after creating a family from two single-parent homes, we knew this challenge was one we could handle with love and grace.

“Oh my gosh!”

It was my turn to exclaim from the inside of a bathroom. My hand shook so badly, I was surprised my stream even hit the pregnancy test. The test read positive before I even finished. It had not taken a while—we were pregnant on the first try. It was really real. We were going to have a baby.

Our parenting wasn’t “almost done” like we’d once thought. Not anymore. And so, in the fall I turned 40, with my husband by my side and his older sisters in the waiting room, Ezra was born. And it all felt perfect.

Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a freelance writer, wife, and mother of three. She writes from home, where PJs are considered acceptable work attire.
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The Friendly Introvert

By Stephanie Schaeffer Silverman

We had been traveling for four days on a guided business trip that combined individuals from different cities and professions. Some of us already knew each other, but the group hadn’t traveled together before. It was a friendly, interesting, intelligent group, but the days were long and the downtime was nonexistent. By day four, I had hit the wall. Please don’t make me talk to anyone. About anything. I find myself praying for a genie to appear and grant my one simple wish—to be alone.

I say this all the time, and it still surprises people. When I tell them I am actually an introvert, it’s often met with: “You?! But you are so friendly.” I’m here to tell you there’s a big difference between being friendly and enjoying hours and hours of chatter. Let me explain.

Friendly is easy—you smile broadly, greet people, make a point of using their name. I’ve got that down. This doesn’t take a lot of my energy. I would equate it to a game of Go Fish. It’s simple and pretty much anyone can play, regardless of age or intellect. Even if I’m tired or cranky, I’ve always got a game of Go Fish in me.

But sustaining extended conversations, pretty much about anything, and pretty much with anyone, regardless of the number of people flowing in and out of the conversation? I put this in the same category as a game of chess: You constantly have to think about your pieces, your particular opponent, three moves from now, five moves from now, and so on. It makes my brain hurt. A lot.

My friends know that the thought of being in a room full of people and making small talk is my version of hell. It’s a lot of energy for a very low yield. You say “cocktail party,” and I want to run the other way. Quickly.

It made me wonder: What is it about these conversations that renders me completely unsatisfied? I have finally learned that I don’t like surface chatter with everyone; I prefer the deep dive with my favorite people.

Frankly, it’s a lot like my parenting, much to my children’s dismay. Don’t tell me the play you saw was “fine;” tell me what about it touched you and was memorable. (Insert eye roll here from any of my darlings.)

It’s why I like parenting my teens way more than parenting my toddlers. We can have deeper conversations (when they are willing, that is), which is what makes me tick. It’s so much more satisfying. In fact, I’m quite sure my kids can hardly wait to ask me some deep questions about my innermost thoughts from my trip—assuming they noticed I was gone all week.

During the trip, though, it was all about the chitchat, not a deep dive with my closest people. So when the guide said, “You have the afternoon free. See you at 7 p.m.,” I had to exercise restraint from throwing my arms around his neck and kissing him.

I donned my workout clothes, threw my phone in my pocket in case I might need GPS, and packed the necessary items in my backpack. I was gleeful as I headed down to the lobby and out the door. I had to stop myself from skipping.

I was lost in thought as I approached the steps of my favorite destination, where I removed my backpack and carefully laid out my items—pen, itinerary, pamphlets, and, finally, my journal. We had been so busy I hadn’t had a chance to jot down anything in it. I relished the chance to chronicle my musings about the sites, and my feelings in general—most definitely my happy place.

Just don’t make me talk to everyone about it.

I say “Cocktail party,” and I want to run the other way. Quickly.
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