Spreadsheet skills

Knowing how to create spreadsheets is an important skill in today's world. Suggest that your teen take a computer elective or attend a library workshop. Then, he can get real-world practice with something that matters to him. He might make a spreadsheet for his budget or to compare features of colleges he wants to attend.

"I promise"

Let your high schooler know that the best way to build trust is for her to keep her word. For example, she should come home by curfew. Or if she borrows her sister's sweater, she should return it when she promised she would—and in the same condition.

Show your interest

When you need to pick up your teen from sports practice, band rehearsal, or drama club, try arriving a few minutes early. You'll get a glimpse of what he's doing, he'll get the message that you care, and it'll give you a way to start a pleasant conversation.

Worth quoting

"That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way." — Doris Lessing

Just for fun

Q: What's the difference between an African elephant and an Indian elephant?
A: About 3,000 miles!
The power of kindness

Being kind not only makes your teen feel good about himself, it encourages others to be kind, too. Share with him these simple ideas for spreading kindness.

Find daily opportunities. Look for chances to practice acts of kindness. You might put coins in someone’s expired parking meter or give up your place in line to a mom with small children. Or step in when family or friends need help (read to a sibling who’s sick, study with a classmate who’s struggling).

Boost reading comprehension

Reading is a critical part of every high school class, from English to history. If your teen can improve her understanding of what she reads, she’ll reap the benefits across all subjects. Share these tactics with your high schooler.

Draw conclusions

Not everything a writer wants the reader to know is written on the page. Details often hint at broader ideas. Example: “John sat down outside the dentist’s office. His face and palms glistened with sweat. He squirmed in the chair, tapping his right foot as he waited.” What conclusions can you draw from the text? (John is nervous about going to the dentist.)

Visualize the scene

Strong readers form pictures in their minds as they read. Imagine what the text is describing. Draw pictures or graphs to illustrate and explain the concepts.

Find relationships

Look for words that show relationships between ideas. Words like similarly and unlike and phrases such as “on the other hand” signal that two ideas are being compared or contrasted.

Thinking ahead to a career

My 10th grader, James, was surprised when his best friend told him he already knew he wanted to be a doctor. “I have no idea what I want to do,” James said.

First I told him that while it’s a good idea to begin thinking about a career, he does have time to explore his options. I suggested that he start keeping a list of activities and subjects he enjoys so we could brainstorm jobs related to them.

Do community service.

Check with the school counselor, local clubs, or places of worship for ideas. Offer to bag groceries at a food bank or sort toys for a gift drive, for example. Tip: Find a friend to join you—it will be more fun to volunteer together.

Give to a charity.

Taking time out of a busy day to think of others will create a habit of kindness. Go through your outgrown clothing and games and box them up to donate. Or fill zipper bags with items for homeless shelters (toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, socks).