

# Teaching Time: How to Help Your Teen Live an Organized Life

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Contrary to the slacker stereotype with which they are often branded, many of today's teenagers are remarkably busy people. Schoolwork, extracurricular activities, volunteer service, and part-time jobs keep many teens on their toes from early in the morning until late at night. And though a solid work ethic is often seen as a key to academic and financial success, teenagers are not immune to the damaging effects associated with overextending oneself.

Writing in the May 2007 edition of *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Katherine Marshall of Canada's Labour and Household Surveys Analysis Division noted that "most teens have relatively high workloads, and not surprisingly, this comes with some feelings of stress. For example, 16 percent considered themselves workaholics, 39 percent felt under constant pressure to accomplish more than they could handle, and most (64 percent) cut back on sleep to get things done."

Parents who are concerned that their teens are overdoing it can help ease the strain by teaching them to incorporate the following time-management skills into their lives:

## **Tip #1: Outline Objectives**

As the Mayo Clinic advises on its website, "planning your day can help you feel more in control of your life." Teens who write down both short-term goals and long-term objectives may find themselves better able to achieve both.

Keeping a "to-do" list can help in a variety of ways: It allows the teen to organize his day, it prevents him from making multiple commitments for the same time period, and it allows him to note areas where he may either be overburdening himself or wasting his time.

Reviewing previous days' to-do lists can also boost your teen's confidence by giving him specific feedback on how much he has accomplished.

## **Tip #2: Indicate Importance**

Instead of merely listing the day's activities in chronological order, work with your teen to help her organize her daily goals in order of importance. The very process of prioritizing her activities will prompt your teen to evaluate the significance of what she is doing with her time.

Plus, listing tasks and responsibilities in order of their importance may help lessen the pressure your teen puts on herself, as she can reduce the "intimidation factor" of a list of objectives by differentiating between what she has to accomplish that day and what she would merely like to get done.

## **Tip #3: Prevent Procrastination**

At first glance, procrastination might look like the ultimate tool for uncluttering one's schedule - after all, your teen could argue, he won't be very busy today if he decides to put everything off until tomorrow, right?

If responsibilities came with penalty-free expiration dates, procrastinating might be the best approach. But back here in the real world, avoiding what needs to be accomplished only delays the inevitable. And waiting until tomorrow, next week, or next month will have a domino effect on your teen's schedule, ultimately forcing him to do work in a shorter time frame while under the stress of a looming (or missed) deadline.

As your teen becomes more adept at scheduling his days and prioritizing his objectives, he should be less prone to procrastinate. The next tip on this list should help, too.

#### **Tip #4: Divide Demands**

As the old adage advises, there's only one way to eat an elephant: one bite at a time.

To your teenager, staring down a particularly complex task or onerous objective can feel like sitting down to a dinner of pan-fried pachyderm. Help her break down large undertakings into a series of achievable interim accomplishments.

For example, instead of letting your teen flip to next month's calendar and write down "turn in term paper" on the due date, show her how to set up a series of intermediate steps (select topic, write outline, finish research, write first draft, complete final revisions) that will get her to her goal on time and with sanity intact.

#### **Tip #5: Tame Technology**

Even with all the ways in which technology can simplify our lives, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that the devices are supposed to be working for us, not vice versa. Teens seem particularly susceptible to the lure of the digital world, and keeping them on track can often be a matter of convincing them to log off.

Computers, cell phones, personal digital assistants, and other electronic instruments have become omnipresent aspects of modern society, but teens need to be taught how to manage what can easily become information overload. For example, while his cell phone's digital calendar can help keep your teen on track, sending and receiving dozens of daily text messages on the same system can distract him from his duties.

Limit your teen's access to entertainment-only electronics (yes, this means you, Xbox), and teach him how to make the most efficient use of the other devices in his digital toolbox.

#### **Tip #6: Decrease Distractions**

Game consoles and mp3 players can command a significant portion of your teenager's attention span, but they are hardly the only enemies in the battle for focus.

Make sure your teen has an orderly, well-lit, and distraction-free environment in which to do her homework, and show her that an assignment that might take two hours when attempted on the living room floor in front of *American Idol* can be completed in a fraction of that time when taken on in the right workspace.

In addition to helping your teen complete her work more quickly (and probably with better results), your distraction-dilution tips will also prepare her for situations such as driving, in which a single-minded focus can literally be a lifesaving skill.

### **Tip #7: Remain Robust**

Three of the most important activities in a busy person's life - sleeping, eating, and exercising - are often the first to be jettisoned in a misguided attempt to remain effective. But though it might seem counterintuitive at first, stopping work in order to eat, sleep, and exercise can actually make a person more productive.

Some may look like adults from the outside, but teen bodies are still works in progress. This means they need proper nutrition and adequate amounts of sleep (at least nine uninterrupted hours a night) to ensure that their bodies develop appropriately.

Make sure your teen isn't attempting to subsist on potato chips and soda, and insist that he gets ample exercise and significant shut-eye. A well-rested, well-fed teenager is better prepared to face the challenges that life will be throwing his way, and a series of studies have associated physical activity with improved mental acuity.

Teenagers face unique pressures and can have a wide range of demands placed on their time - but in today's multi-tasking, information-onslaught society, they're far from alone in facing this challenge. Teaching them to organize their lives and address their stresses in the most positive way possible will not only allow them to merely survive their high school years, but will also put them on the path to a more efficient and rewarding future.