Ensuring school year is productive



By Julie Franklin

The beginning of the school year is the best time for teens and parents. There is an abundance of hope: hope for good grades, good attendance, a decrease in behavior problems, you name it. Teens want to make themselves and their parents proud, or at least steer clear of consequences that bad grades and behavior bring.

Here are some tips to help you and your teen get off to a strong start this school year.

â€¢ Meet their teachers: Attend Back to School Night or make an effort on the first few days of school to meet all of their teachers. Get the email addresses for each teacher in case you need to use it. There is no need to email the teacher all the time unless you have a specific concern or your teen has a behavior you are trying to correct, like not turning in homework, etc. Don’t hesitate to call or email concerns or questions. Read over the course syllabus or any pertinent literature sent home. Be aware of big due dates, such as research papers or reports.

â€¢ A place to study: Whether itâ€™s a the kitchen table or a desk in their room, students of all ages need some place to study. Although many students can study with music playing, they usually need a place absent of interruptions.

â€¢ Show an interest: Although they may not seem like it,

teens usually feel pleased and supported when their parents show an interest in their academic life. Find out what types of books they like, what topics they choose for research, reports or freestyle pieces. Many parents have no problem showing interest in the extracurricular areas of their teen such as music, art, or sports. Show that same support for math, English and science. Ask to see their homework, offer to help proofread their papers, help quiz them for an upcoming test or quiz.

â€¢ Be aware of progress reports: In most schools there are some sort of reports during the months that lead up to the final semester grades in January. Visit your schoolâ€™s website or call ahead of time. Know when to expect these reports in your email or mail. Teens have been known to intercept the mail if an unfavorable grade is inside. Progress reports will help you realize if your teen in struggling academically. There are also a special type of progress reports that are available in some schools, weekly progress reports. This is usually arranged through the counselors office. The student carries the progress around to each teacher once a week, say on Fridays. The teacher gives a comment that includes present grade and behavior. The progress report in this case will be handed back to the parent. Consequences and rewards can be tied to this. It is also a good device if you are trying to see the increase of a specific grade.

â€¢ Scheduling a parent teacher conference: If your student is showing signs of struggling academically, grades of C- or lower, call the school and schedule a meeting with that specific teacher. If your teen is struggling across the board or if you feel that behaviorally they need adjustment or an informal intervention from all their teachers, schedule a parent teacher conference with all their teachers at one time. It is usually beneficial for all parties to hear everyoneâ€™s view. Encourage the student themselves and both parents to

attend if possible.

â€¢ Getting a tutor: If your teen is really struggling, and you feel as if the subject matter is beyond your understanding, arrange for tutoring. Contact the teacher first as many times students may come in at lunch or after school for extra help from the teacher. Peer tutors may also be found (often for a fee) through the teacher or by contacting the counseling office.

â€¢ Rewarding grades/behavior: Students of all ages should be given some sort of positive reinforcement for desired results. Your teen doesnâ€™t have to bring home Aâ€™s & Bâ€™s for a reward of some sort. Maybe you set goals for high grades, maybe you set goals for improved grades or behavior. Suggested rewards may be the obvious like clothes, money or a gift. Other ideas include increased amount cell phone incentives, time with friends or a night out to dinner. You may choose to set up a reward system linked to progress reports every few months or something more frequent.

â€¢ Appropriate consequences: In the same way that desired results should be rewarded, poor academic effort and behavior should involve a consequence if there is a desire to decrease that behavior or outcome. If your student pulls up way short of the goal you both have set, some privileges could be revoked or decreased. Consequences are much more effective if they are natural and related to either the negative behavior or the outcome desired â€“ so for example if you get a bad grade, the cell phone or computer or TV time might be limited because you need more time to study. In addition, the best way I have found as a teacher and a parent, is to decide ahead of time what the various consequences will be for a specific situation. This way both parties are making decisions and coming to an understanding with a clear, calm head. An example might be, â€œIf you are getting a D or below in any subject, your cell phone is taken away until that grade is brought up.â€ Other privileges which can be manipulated include:

phone time, TV time, video games, TV in room, the car, time with friends/boy or girlfriend, computer time, shopping, allowance, etc.

â€¢ More tips and helpful articles: There are many wonderful and helpful websites out there with great tips. One website that has a ton of articles that pertain to Back to School and school success, etc. is About.com. The exact address is: http://parentingteens.about.com/od/education/a/back_to_school.htm. They have tons of articles on: Getting Organized, How to avoid Morning Mania, Tips to get your teen to do their homework, How to Attend a Back to School Night and much more! Check it out!

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