

How to Get Your Teen College Ready

Is your teen ready for college? Are they prepared for the challenges they will face in and out of the classroom? For many parents who answer “No” to that question, these next few months or years can be a testing ground to determine if your student has what it takes to succeed in college. But how can both parents and their students get ready for the demands of life in college?

There are two types of college readiness you should consider: academic and personal. Academic readiness means that your teen has the high school grades, standardized test scores, and the academic skills to get into college and make a reasonably smooth transition. If your high school student is struggling in any of those areas, there is still time to improve these measures of college readiness.

Academics, however, is only part of the story for college success. While your teen’s track record in high school may help them earn a spot in college, you will want to ask yourself, “Do they also have other skills that help them thrive when they get there?” Personal readiness means all those habits and behaviors that get them to class, facilitate learning, and help them develop lasting relationships. The good news here, too, is that these skills can be developed now.

What to Do If Your Student Is Not Academically Ready

Prep for the test.

There needs to be adequate preparation for high-stakes tests such as the ACT and SAT. There are many options, many of which are free and accessible online. Consider signing your teen up for a test prep class or using the free videos and resources. Then, plan for at least 4 weeks of prep time before the next test. Repeat this strategy as many times as you can before you need to submit final scores to colleges.

Find a tutor.

If your student’s high school is less than stellar, consider tutoring as a supplement to their learning outside the classroom. The benefits to tutoring include, obviously, the opportunity to earn better grades in their high school classes. But there is also the benefit of asking for and seeking help, which will be a key to success in college. They will also learn more about the learning process and how to manage it effectively, which will be helpful as they meet the higher expectations of studying and taking tests in college.

Read regularly.

The more your student reads while in school and during breaks from school, the stronger those reading skills will be when they get to college. The good news is that reading for pleasure counts! If your student is not a strong reader now, consider using alternative strategies to build comprehension skills such as audiobooks, videos or film, and short works that interest your student. Once your student gets more fluent reading, you can then introduce more challenging and longer texts.



Participate in summer enrichment programs.

Many colleges offer summer programs that allow students to experience the college environment before they begin as true freshmen; many of those programs focus on a topic or a discipline that a student may be interested in as a major. Some programs even offer college credit courses while others provide workshops and experiences that will help students get ready for the demands of college. Programs are often available for high school freshmen through the summer before their first year of college.

What to Do If Your Student Is Not Personally Ready**Help them develop time management skills.**

It should go without saying that your teen should start managing their time and tasks as much as possible. In college, they will juggle multiple demands for their time in addition to the newfound “freedom,” which often leads to bad habits such as procrastination. Get your teen a planner or a wall calendar and require them to use it to track projects, practices, and appointments. Talk through those recorded tasks regularly with your student to help them prioritize and problem solve as they face challenges in managing their time effectively.

Let them manage themselves effectively.

Every parent occasionally has had to cajole their teen to wake up, eat their vegetables, and take a shower, but if you are finding that your emerging adult needs constant reminders to take care of themselves, then it may be time to give them more control—and the consequences that come with that control—of managing themselves. When they are away at college, they will need to get enough sleep, to eat healthfully, and to make the time to bathe and do their laundry. Start the conversation as early as their freshman year about these expectations and begin the process of turning over the management of themselves to your young adult. Continue to build more responsibility into their schedule as they become juniors and seniors.

Talk about how to handle stressful situations.

No matter how prepared your student is for college, they will face some amount of stress. Higher academic expectations, being away from home for the first time, making new friends, and managing almost everything on their own can lead to a meltdown or two. Prepare your student now for handling stress in a positive way by talking to them about their stress triggers. Are they aware of what stresses them out? Then, talk about healthy ways that they can deal with that stress. Exercise, meditation, or talking to someone can help students cope. The more your student understands now about causes for their stress and how they can best manage their responses, the better prepared they will be for college.

Make sure they know to seek help and advocate for themselves.

One of the most important personal readiness factors in college is the ability to advocate for oneself. Put simply, your student needs to develop skills to speak up and seek help should they need it. For young adults, this skill is hard to develop because they are used to having others, such as their parents, speak on their behalf. Help them develop these skills before college by assigning them tasks such as making their own doctor’s appointments or even calling in a take-out order. These small interactions can lead to more important ones such as talking to a teacher or coach or returning an item to a store. Help them develop more confidence by talking through what they need to say and questions they need to ask.

Whether they need to improve their academic or personal readiness—or both—your student can start now to develop skills and habits that will help them succeed in college.

Adapted from: <https://openstax.org/details/books/college-success>

