

Chapter 1

College Success Requires Maturity: Is Your Teenager Ready, and Are You?

Most parents send their students off to college assuming—or with fingers crossed—that they have matured enough through their high school years to handle conflicts, to make safe decisions, and to generally take care of themselves. After all, at age eighteen they are legally adults, and their parents have done their best to teach them the basics: right from wrong, good manners, being responsible. In short, these children have been shaped into well-adjusted, mature young adults. Or have they? Despite parents' best intentions, sometimes their teenager has not developed the maturity he or she needs to handle conflicts with a roommate, to take seriously the investment made, or to know when she or he is overwhelmed. Regardless of why that may be, it is important to be realistic about your teenager's maturity and readiness for college before she fills out college applications. Remember, she will be on her own for probably the first time in her life and facing situations she has never faced before. Is she ready?

How responsible are eighteen-year-olds?

Back in the 1960s and early 1970s, when baby boomers went to college, the old concept of *in loco parentis* was still a lingering reality on some college campuses. The idea was that colleges were, at least in part, supposed to operate as substitute parents for students while they were enrolled. This was the argument behind "closing hours" for dorms (mostly women's dorms), separate housing for men and women, bed checks in the middle of the night, and the often dreaded envelopes at the end of

freshman semesters informing parents of students' grades. In spite of the fact that, back then, there were proportionately fewer young people who went on to college after high school than there are today, the fact that an eighteen-year-old was still in school meant he or she was in some ways still a child.

Beginning in the mid- to late 1960s, however, things shifted. Not only have school policies changed, but so has the law. Housing is often coed, or partially so, with both sexes sharing a building, sharing the same wing of a building, or, in some cases, occupying rooms commingled on the same floor. Although policies vary from school to school, many colleges and universities allow students to have overnight visitors of the opposite sex in their rooms, requiring only that they sign in at the desk. Hardly any dorms today have the traditionally hated closing hours. The most significant changes, perhaps, are the two areas in which recent privacy laws have severely limited the discretion a school may use to inform parents about their student's situation: the legislation known as FERPA (Family Education and Right to Privacy Act) and HIPAA (Health, Information, Portability, and Accountability Act). As we discuss more fully in Chapter 7, under these privacy laws, unless your student signs specific release forms both for the school and for medical services (the local hospital and campus health center), your call to inquire about your student's welfare may well follow the path in the following story.

Jean and Bob had not heard from their daughter, Emily, for more than three weeks. Repeated efforts to call her on both her dorm room phone and her cell phone had failed. Frantic late-night messages went unanswered. Jean and Bob knew Emily's roommate's name was Heather, an English major from Houston, but they knew little more than that. Emily had been dating a junior engineering student who lived off-campus, but efforts to contact him using a telephone number listed in the campus directory produced only a "no longer in service" message. Feeling a little embarrassed, but also exasperated, Bob called the hall supervisor of the dorm.

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The hall supervisor told Bob that all she could do was conduct a “welfare check”—meaning that the supervisor would look into the situation and then encourage Emily to call her parents. No, the supervisor could not tell them if Emily had been sleeping elsewhere. No, she could not tell them if Emily had been going to class. No, she could not tell them if Emily was seeing a mental health counselor (Emily had experienced some episodes of depression while in high school).irate, Bob demanded to know why in hell not? To which the supervisor replied, “I am not allowed, by law, to answer your questions, but I really will check and see what I can find out and try to get Emily to call you.”

Whether parents are ready for it or not, when their kids turn eighteen years of age, whether they go off to college, work full time in the labor force, or enter the military, they are legal adults and eligible to do most anything except buy alcohol. However, as larger percentages of our nation’s young adults are now seeking some kind of post-high school education or training, and are therefore still classified as students, most parents and much of society still tend to think of these young adults as “kids.” And with good reason: most still need our financial help, most have never been on their own, and, like the fledglings they are, they still need guidance.

Liam was a freshman at the University of Colorado. His family lived only an hour’s drive from campus, but Liam’s parents respected his independence and did not pester him to call and come home often. Liam enjoyed his new freedom, but he stayed in semiregular contact with his mom and dad. One morning, nineteen-year-old Liam called his mom with this story: “Mom, I went snowboarding yesterday with some of the guys and landed a jump wrong. I slammed my face into my knees and my nose bled pretty bad. My eye is black-and-blue and real swollen, and my face hurts like hell. Should I go to the

health clinic?" Patiently, Mom reminded Liam that they bought the health clinic package just for this sort of thing. "Yes, please, go now," she said. It turned out that Liam had to go to a local hospital for an MRI that showed he had a small facial fracture below his eye.

Despite the fact that Liam and his fellow students still occasionally ask for parental advice, they alone are responsible for themselves. The problem with the image of students as "kids" is that it often contributes to the related idea that somehow college is just an extension of high school. Many parents tend to see colleges as responsible for taking care of their "kids" once the students arrive on campus, or at least see the schools as responsible for keeping track of them and reporting back to parents if there is a problem. Students, as well, tend to see colleges in this light, although they generally assume more personal liberties for themselves than their parents do.

However, and this comes as a surprise to both parents and students more often than one might think, college life is decidedly not the same thing as high school, only larger. Going to a high school party where there are drugs or alcohol present is not the same thing as having a neighbor living four feet away from you who is getting drunk two or three nights a week and/or doing drugs just as often, and insisting on sharing his experiences at 3 or 4 a.m. Having a sexually active friend in high school is not the same thing as having a roommate who repeatedly brings her boyfriend to bed with her in your 12-by-16-foot dorm room during midterm exams. And having a high school friend who sometimes ditches class is not the same thing as knowing that your friend down the hall has not been seen nor heard from in two weeks.

It was obvious from the beginning that Carmen's first-semester freshman-year roommate at Montana State University was a partier. The roommate found a party most nights of the week, drank heavily, then found her way back to the dorm

room to sleep it off. Due to her late nights and hangovers, the roommate skipped most of her classes. Although Carmen had been to parties in high school where alcohol was consumed, it was quite a different situation to be living with someone who continually partied and came home drunk four to five nights a week. Carmen was not a drinker and although she tolerated the roommate, it was a very unsatisfactory living condition for her.

College life definitely will present social and emotional changes and challenges for students. Helping them prepare for these changes is essential for their success.

Ready for college or not?

When your student begins college, not only will he have some social, personal lifestyle adjustments to make, but he will have to maneuver through specific academic challenges as well. As incoming freshmen, students will need to be ready, willing, and able to function successfully in an academic bureaucracy. It is up to parents, therefore, to help students get ready for a level of personal responsibility that they are unlikely to have encountered before, or perhaps even imagined. Unfortunately, this is not something parents can accomplish the week before Sarah and Josh head off to school by simply explaining to them the demands they will face, since by this time they often are listening less to Mom and Dad than to anyone and likely would not believe that their parents could offer some useful insight.

Another thing to consider: If your student is already a high school senior and you are fairly certain that he is not ready for such a transition, it may simply mean he needs a bit more time. Going straight to college from high school is not the right road for every student, no matter how much they are pushed in that direction. Objectively evaluate your teenager's readiness and be willing to consider alternative routes to success.

Jackson was a bright, creative student who struggled with ADD. He also experienced bouts of depression and was caught a few times with marijuana in the early years of high school. By the end of his junior year, he had completed all of the courses required for graduation and scored well on several Advanced Placement exams. Jackson's parents felt he had matured since his earlier years of difficulty and was taking more responsibility for himself, although he still found focusing and paying attention to be difficult tasks. When his high school senior year loomed ahead, Jackson's mother grew concerned that the light load of courses he was choosing to take as a senior would not stimulate his active, quick mind. For several weeks, she suggested he finish high school the following December, then take a few months to do volunteer service somewhere in the world. Slowly, Jackson came around to the idea. Things fell into place and Jackson and his college-attending brother are lined up to volunteer for three months with a conservation organization in Peru. In the meantime, Jackson filled out a couple of college applications. Not surprisingly, Jackson recently told his mother he just isn't sure about going to college.

"Everything that is hard for me in school—sitting for a long time in a classroom and listening to someone lecture—is what worries me about college," Jackson told his mom. "I don't know what I want to do, but I don't want more of boring classroom time."

Now Jackson and his mom are exploring the idea of him postponing his college career. Once he returns from Peru, hopefully with new insights and ideas, he is considering taking a few classes at a local community college while he decides if college is right for him and, if so, when to go.

Keep in mind that it is never too late for your student to go to school, as long as you are willing to admit that she may be one of the many thousands of students who take a somewhat unconventional path through academia.

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Not only are there a myriad of different college environments available to suit your student's personal needs, but the numbers of "nontraditional students"—those who spend a few years working, growing, and learning before returning to campuses to complete their degrees—continues to expand as well.

Gabe was a bright student who made high marks in high school, until his senior year. His mother, Alice, said he had taken all his required courses and was basically coasting his final year, bored with school and its lack of academic challenges. Making things worse, Gabe started experimenting with alcohol and marijuana and hanging with a crowd of kids who felt they were wasting their time in high school. With less than three months to graduate, Gabe, at age eighteen, dropped out of school.

Gabe did decide to test for a general education diploma (GED). "He just went and took the test without any preparation," Alice said. "He scored so high that he received a letter praising his good efforts."

But it wasn't until Gabe was twenty-one that Alice and her husband were able to convince him to try college. Gabe entered a two-year community college and "loved it," Alice said. Gabe eagerly and successfully went on to study and complete a degree in microbiology at a four-year university.

While you ponder your student's readiness to attend college, take an honest look at your child and home environment, and determine his strengths and needs, but also what may hinder his success in college. Academic advisors, mental health counselors, faculty members, and campus police whom we interviewed all pointed to two basic home situations that can lead directly to academic failure: situations of privilege and neglect. Students whose family life can be characterized as a life of privilege or entitlement (and/or the frequently accompanying life of indulgence) or as a life of emotional neglect (if not also financial or physical neglect) are most

often the ones who do not make it through to a college degree. They are, in fact, the ones who most often encounter painful, emotional difficulties, some of which can lead to involvement of campus counselors and police.

The pitfalls for the privileged and sheltered

The two terms, privilege and neglect, represent the two extremes of the continuum with which most parents struggle: trying to be involved in their children's lives but not smothering them; trying to help, while getting out of the way at the same time. However, more is needed than to just find a happy medium between the two extremes; parents need to look at just what this means. What kind of parenting are we talking about?

Katie was a natural for an RA (resident assistant) position at Montana State University. Her mom, Caroline, described Katie as a "friend magnet" and very accepting of people, faults and all. Katie went through one and a half weeks of RA training, most of which concerned the programs and policies of the dorm and how to apply them for her dorm floor. But Katie came to the job already equipped with the most important tool she needed as an RA: she had been taught at home, long before her college years, to work out problems in a way that is acceptable to all parties involved. "People who don't do well in the dorm are people who haven't gotten over their stage of self-centeredness," Katie observed.

Katie explained that there was a group of four girls who came to her often to complain about each other and ask to be moved. Of the four, Katie said, "three were very spoiled and one was not." The girls were friends, but their friendship included a fair amount of drama that brought them knocking on Katie's

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door throughout the semester. They complained to Katie that they were not getting along and wanted to switch roommates. Katie and the four girls agreed to a swapped arrangement, but the complaints continued. One of the girls shifted rooms throughout the year and all of them, at one time or another, asked for a private room.

To make the situation worse, one of the girls Katie had described as “spoiled” began a hate campaign against another girl. After the victim asked for help, Katie agreed to talk with the perpetrator. As Katie described the victim’s feelings, the initiator of the hate campaign argued that “her Nanna told her that she didn’t have to be nice to somebody if she didn’t want to be.” Despite Katie’s efforts to reason with the girl about her bullying, the girl continued her offensive behavior. “So the problem never got completely solved,” Katie explained, “but I was able to get the rest of the girls on the floor to defend the victim and not join in on gossip and ridicule.”

It seems apparent that at least some students who bully, including the student described above, are used to getting their own way more often than might be deemed healthy. Katie experienced and interpreted the situation as one in which a student’s “stage of self-centeredness” has been unintentionally (or intentionally) nurtured during her younger years. The situation she described is typical of many students, in particular those described by counselors as rooted in the common problems of the entitled and indulged mentalities. Estranged roommates angrily demand to be moved immediately to another room, all the while asserting their claim that it was the other’s behavior that caused the problem. Or conversely, a student isolates himself in his room in front of his computer and will not come out or talk with a counselor, choosing instead to stay perpetually “online.”

Such behavior is evident in academics also. Every semester there are a few students who are blindsided by the fact that they are not getting the grades they received in high school.

Although the e-mail denouncing her teaching ability was anonymous, Dr. Williams was sure it came from Marie. Marie often skipped Dr. Williams's class and made little effort to discover what she might have missed. When Marie ended up with a failing grade on her midterm, she met with Dr. Williams to complain and insist that the grade was Dr. Williams's fault for being a poor teacher. Marie insisted she had made straight As in high school and that she would be making As now if the instruction were clear. Dr. Williams pointed out that Marie missed vital information when she skipped class and could not expect to perform well on tests. Marie finished the course with an F, and shortly afterward, Dr. Williams received an anonymous e-mail full of insults and highly critical comments about her teaching ability.

Like Marie, students who find themselves in academic trouble appear confused when discovering that they actually are going to be penalized for turning in a research paper a week late. They express dismay, and even outrage, that an argument with their roommate the night before a test does not automatically earn them the right to take a makeup exam. Parking tickets have to be paid, not ignored; property damage resulting from a party is the host's responsibility, even if the guests were uninvited. Add to this the normal pressures of final exams, and what often happens is that these same students engage in angry, acting-out behaviors that may include excessive drinking or drugging, fighting, or vandalism. One campus police official, when asked what would be the first message he wished to convey to parents, stated emphatically that parents need to have established a lifestyle of "structure and consequences" for their children long before coming to college.

Probably every child today has experienced a "time-out" or some other form of discipline for pushing, shoving, not sharing, temper tantrums, or whatever. The problem is, once our kids are teenagers, many of us either

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neglect to follow through in imposing such consequences or else we are inconsistent about it, often backing down under a barrage of teenage logic. In reality, consequences are much more difficult to impose and enforce once our children reach that sudden argumentative and defiant stage of adolescence so well depicted in the popular comic strip “Zits.” Author Anthony Wolf speaks directly about the difficulty of parenting teenagers in his book, *Get Out of My Life, but first could you drive me and Cheryl to the mall?:*

Teenagers of today have been raised in an era of far less harsh parenting practices. Their world may be complicated and scary; nonetheless, they feel more empowered than teenagers of previous generations. They are mouthier, less directly obedient, especially at home. This change in teenager behavior is real. It requires a similar change in teenager parenting.

While we struggle to find the parenting technique to fit the problem at hand, the effort becomes confusing if the consequences come from someone else, such as a teacher or the soccer coach. We may instinctively jump to our child’s defense without looking into the situation more closely. It is possible, after all, that our Josh or Sarah did, in fact, strike the first blow, cheat on a test, or scream at the referee. As difficult as it may be to accept, while our children are on that proverbial road to maturity, it is important for them to occasionally push the boundaries a little and check out the result. Such behavior is not only normal, but essential if kids are going to figure out how the world really works. But it also is important that there be parentally imposed consequences while they are still under our care; otherwise, they will push further until other authorities, such as school staff or law enforcement, do the enforcing.

We need to remember that if and when our legal-adult students go off to college, we will not be there to rescue or protect them, nor will we be there to administer consequences, and we shouldn’t be. Josh and Sarah will be required to function as adults, without a parent’s watchful eye and

steadying hand. This is not to say, however, that they should be or will be cut loose with no emotional or financial support (see Chapters 8 and 9). What it does mean is that if we've been running interference for our kids throughout middle and high school—arguing with their teachers over grades or requirements, helping them put a project together the night before it is due, pulling them from an activity because they do not immediately excel, making excuses for them when they miss a homework assignment—then we should not be surprised if they find the adjustment to college life extremely difficult, even overwhelming. Peter Stearns of George Mason University and author of *Anxious Parenting: A History of Modern Childrearing in America*, says that parents often don't believe their child can handle a difficult situation. "Middle-class parents especially assume that if kids start getting into difficulty they need to rush in and do it for them, rather than let them flounder a bit and learn from it. I don't mean we should abandon them," Stearns said, "but give them more credit for figuring things out." As child psychologist and Tufts University professor David Elkind says in the 2004 article "A Nation of Wimps": "Kids need to feel badly sometimes. We learn through experience and we learn through bad experiences. Through failure, we learn how to cope."

If you see yourself as a parent who has perhaps been rescuing, try this approach the next time your high schooler comes crying over a missed assignment: "It sounds like you've got a problem. What are you going to do about it?" Then, let your student do the doing. Many times students get it right, as the following story illustrates.

Serena chose Colorado State University because she wanted to experience a part of the country outside her native California. Serena admits she was lucky to have supportive parents who were always willing to listen. It also helped that her parents were wealthy and could afford to pay for her to have a single room in the dorm after she and her roommate became unbearable to each other. They also paid for a cell phone plan with 5,000 unlimited minutes, they flew out to see her a few times each school year, and they shipped Serena's two horses to

Colorado. “I was sheltered and very lucky,” Serena said of her family life. But her parents expected Serena to be serious about her schoolwork and to work for her spending money. She did both, working part-time, landing an internship, and graduating with a degree in communications. Best of all, she is well adjusted and ready to face the world.

Resisting the urge to shelter, to rush in and do it yourself, to fix it when something goes wrong, is hard for many parents. But letting your teenager do it himself, make mistakes, and face consequences gives him the experiences and skills that will help him as he ventures off after high school.

The pitfalls of neglect

The other end of the family environment continuum is neglect. There have always been, and continue to be, parents who take the attitude, “You’re on your own now. You’re eighteen years old and out of the house; whatever happens you’ll have to deal with it.” While it is true that some students can cope with this situation, and even excel under these circumstances, it is generally a mistake to think that your son or daughter is one of those who can. Students whose parents do not call or write, do not visit the campus or their student’s dorm or apartment, or do not become involved when the student receives some form of disciplinary action or begins failing classes—these are the students who often disappear off the university radar screen pretty quickly. Many never return.

Although the movie “Ordinary People” is dated, some of its themes still seem to resonate with students. After viewing a portion of the movie (in a class on family dynamics), including scenes in which severe communication problems between the troubled son and his mother are portrayed, a student approached

her instructor after class. "That's my family they were showing," she said. "I'm so alone." In the same class, another student wrote in his journal: "My dad and mom are divorced, and my dad has decided that buying a motorcycle and touring the country is more important than my college education, both financially and in terms of him calling me or coming to see me. He says that it's his turn now."

It should be noted that all forms of neglect are not relatively easy to recognize. In reality, neglect can be completely unintentional. There are many parents who, even while they may be wringing their hands and frantically trying to figure out what to do about their student who shows signs of being lost, depressed, or unable to cope, may be so intimidated by the prospect of interfering that they become immobilized.

By the time kids are in their late teens and are preparing to leave high school, parents have been repeatedly advised to "let loose" and allow their fledglings to learn from their own experiences. Paradoxically, however, if taken to extreme, this otherwise sound advice can become the cause of serious problems if it results in our failure to act on our student's interest when that help is most needed.

Jim Weber, M.S.W., therapist and counselor at Colorado State University, works with students who are facing disciplinary action by the university. He described the common situation of a student running out of options: The old coping strategies from high school are not working, grades are falling, money is tight, and disciplinary action is pending, perhaps not for the first time. In spite of a certain amount of "I'm fine, nothing to worry about" posturing on the part of the student, Weber said this is the time it is crucial for parents to be the older, wiser, and supportive adult family member. "I wish I could empower parents more, to get them involved more directly," Weber said. "Too many are timid about trying to intercede when their son or

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daughter show signs of trouble.” The student, Weber said, has been so successful in getting her parents to “back off” that she cannot easily turn back to the parents for help, and the parents are uncomfortable taking the initiative.

Weber, as well as other counselors who concurred with his view, reported that parents of students who are seriously struggling sometimes call university counselors to talk about their student’s situation—be it pending academic suspension or substance abuse problems or roommate issues. While these parents are clearly worried about their son or daughter, they are often reluctant to talk with the students themselves, either over the phone or in person. Counselors said that a common parental response is: “I don’t want to be too doting or interfering.”

Add to this the privacy and confidentiality laws that prohibit counselors or other staff from revealing any specifics concerning the nature of a student’s situation, and you end up with parents asking counselors to act as intermediaries—something they cannot do. What they can and often will do is recommend that parents contact the student directly, and they encourage students to talk with their parents. From the counselors’ viewpoint, when a student is failing or moving into a substance abuse problem or is otherwise overwhelmed, that is when parents need to be involved even if the student does not want to admit that he needs help. Of course, families with a history of talking to each other frequently and openly, even during those difficult teen years of high school, are going to be the best prepared.

Paulo, a University of Florida architecture student, believes parents should not “baby” kids while they are in high school. He adjusted well to college life, primarily, he said, because his parents made him responsible for curfews and other social issues while he was in high school; abuse of those responsibilities came with reasonable consequences. Some of his new college friends were not so lucky. Paulo told the story of a “preacher’s

daughter” who had been raised in a very strict, parent-controlled environment. “She couldn’t handle the freedom when she got to college,” Paulo recalls. During her first semester she began drinking regularly and became sexually active with more than one member of the football team. Her parents discovered her inappropriate, risky behavior, yanked her out of the university, and enrolled her in a small school near their home. “They were a great family, but her father was more involved in his work than his kids,” Paulo said. “When she moved to the University of Florida, she went wild.”

Intervention when a student is in trouble is not the kind of involvement that constitutes a parent trying to rescue a student from the consequences of her actions. Rather, older adults—parents, counselors, and other relevant participants—are trying to constructively help the student deal with whatever consequences she already faces so that she can recover and move on. Options are created, new choices made. It also should be noted that in a few such cases, if the relationship between parent and student involves abuse or other dysfunctional dynamics, the counselors might recommend a course of action to the student that represents a positive intervention strategy but does not rely on direct parental involvement.

Preparing Your Teenager: Growing Your Teenager’s Maturity

So, how do we help our teenagers be “ready”? At this point, two basic facts stand out: First, the emotional maturity necessary to steer through the college years will not develop mysteriously during the last few months of high school—they must be developed during the early and midteen years. Second, you and your student have choices. You have choices about when, where, and under what circumstances college comes into the picture, or if, in fact, it comes into the picture at all. The following scenarios offer suggestions to consider as you prepare your students for the challenges

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and changes they will face when they make the transition to college life.

1) Make a list of your teenager's emotional strengths and weaknesses, as in the following example:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Shows bravery by participating in new events without friends.	Doesn't follow through on what he promises.
Probes until he gets an answer he understands.	Has a hot temper and is argumentative.
Is friendly and outgoing.	Is anxious if left out.
Is able to recognize when he is wrong and apologize.	Takes too many risks at weekend parties.

2) Encourage and reward your student's strengths.

Challenge	Solution
Your teenager decides to play on a city recreation soccer team after failing to make the high school team.	Praise her for continuing to play a sport she enjoys just for the fun of it. Show up for the rec games and support her team.
Although she really wants to go to a friend's party, your teenager accepts that she must attend a family event instead.	Praise her for seeing the importance of family as well as friends, and be sure that other family members engage her warmly. Suggest she host a party for her friends in the near future.
Without prompting, your teenager tells you she lied about where she was. She apologizes and admits she did wrong.	Explain that although you are disappointed in her lying, you accept the apology sincerely and you are glad she realizes it was wrong. Ask her why she lied and why she apologized. Work through the process with her to reinforce good decision making.

3) Develop a lifestyle of structure and consequences for your teenager.

Challenge	Solution
<p>More than once, your teenager has agreed to feed and exercise the neighbors' dog while they are out of town. He consistently has a conflict and begs you to feed the dog in his place.</p>	<p>You should refuse the first time it happens, but if you have covered for him a few times, stop doing so. If he is away from home at feeding time, charge him for the inconvenience of picking him up to bring him home to feed the dog or charge him for feeding the dog yourself. Or, make him explain to the neighbor that he asked you to feed however many times and be sure the neighbor reduces his payment for the times you fed their dog.</p>
<p>Your teenager asks if he can borrow the car to meet some friends at the movie. He is a newly licensed driver and is not allowed to have passengers yet. You discover he took two friends to the movie.</p>	<p>Before your teenager is granted a driver's license, have a signed driving contract that clearly spells out your expectations and consequences for infractions. Be sure you state that driving is a privilege, not a right. Example contracts are readily available on the Internet. Confront him and ask him for an explanation. Listen without interruption, then ask him to repeat the law (or your rules) about passengers for new drivers. Pull out the contract and show him the consequence already agreed upon. Most important, follow through on those consequences.</p>

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Challenge	Solution
Your teenager tells you he is spending the night with a friend, but instead goes to an unsupervised party, where he spends the night. You find out when talking to the friend's parents	Confront your teenager with the evidence. Ask him to explain his actions and why he lied, then listen. Remind him of your expectations and why you didn't want him to go, then ask him what he thinks should happen as a result of his behavior—he might give you some good ideas! Carry through on whatever consequences you implement.

4) Help your teenager find common ground and reach satisfactory conclusions during conflict.

Challenge	Solution
Your teenager explodes in anger if you tell her she cannot attend a certain party.	You know the mantra here: Don't get caught in the escalation. As hard as it is to do, you should firmly state that there will be no discussion until she calms down, then walk away. When she (and you) calm down, acknowledge her efforts to try again. Listen to her arguments for the party without interruption, be open-minded, and look for information you might have missed. Then insist she listen to your arguments against the party without interruption. If she explodes again, start over. If not, ask her if she can think of a compromise. Have one in mind yourself. Although you have the ultimate decision, the point is to try to teach her to handle conflict without exploding and to work toward a satisfactory conclusion.

Toward College Success: Is Your Teenager Ready, Willing, and Able?

Challenge	Solution
<p>Your teenager tells you that a group of friends she hangs with has started putting down and trying to embarrass a girl that your daughter has known since preschool; the girl is shy and a loner. Your daughter feels uncomfortable but wants to stay in favor with the popular girls.</p>	<p>First listen to her dilemma. Then ask her why she thinks the popular girls are after the shy girl. Ask her how she thinks the shy girl feels about the way she is treated. Ask her if she has ever felt that way. Ask her if she feels confident enough to tell the popular girls to stop their bullying. What will she lose? If she doesn't feel strong enough, suggest that she walk away when the bullying begins. Then ask her to be sure to talk with the shy girl, maybe asking her to get together for a movie or a sleepover. Keep the conversation going over the following days, trying to build your teen's self-confidence enough to say no to the bullying.</p>
<p>Your teenager comes home in a rage, calling her math teacher foul names and claiming he is out to get her. You know she struggles in math and the teacher has a reputation of being tough. She begs you to call the school and have her switched to another class or she knows she will fail.</p>	<p>Begin by telling her you will talk with her after she has a chance to calm down. Then ask her about the difficulties she is having in class—focus on the academics, not the teacher. Ask what help she has asked for. If the answer is none, suggest she start by talking with her teacher. Remind her that there will always be teachers, and future employers, whom she will not like. Nevertheless, it is crucial to learn to work with all kinds of people. Follow up in the following days to see if she has spoken with her teacher.</p>

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5) Guide your teenager toward coping skills to overcome his shortcomings.

Challenge	Solution
<p>Your teenager is shy and doesn't like to speak out or ask questions in class. He must take a speech class to fulfill district graduation requirements.</p>	<p>Recognize that a speech class will be tough for your son. At family events or social activities, ask a few adults to go out of their way to ask him questions about what he is doing or his plans, carrying on a genuine conversation. Take your son to hear speakers, particularly those telling a story of overcoming hardships. Encourage your son to participate in organizations that allow opportunities to speak up and be involved, such as Scouts or 4-H. Relate your personal stories of overcoming a hardship. Praise his efforts at speaking up.</p>
<p>Your teenager is a good student, but he lacks confidence and follows after the popular crowd instead of finding his own way. More than once you have found out he was drinking while "hanging" with the crowd.</p>	<p>While the dangers and illegality of drinking, and consequences for imbibing, should be part of the conversation, you also should ask how he feels about his behavior. Ask him to repeat the rules and laws about underage drinking. Ask him how he feels about breaking those laws. Help him to identify safe, but peer-approved, activities in which he can participate. Suggest he plan some of those events and ask friends to join him. Steer him toward activities he feels good about and in which he can take a lead.</p>

6) Give your teenager the opportunity to learn from her mistakes.

Challenge	Solution
<p>The big history project was assigned a month earlier. Your teenager waited until the weekend before the Monday it was due to get started. It was clear to her by Sunday afternoon that she was not going to complete it on time. She begs you to let her stay home on Monday to finish, claiming she'll never let something go this late again.</p>	<p>You are tempted to let her stay home because you know it will hurt her grade if she doesn't turn the project in on time. However, she most likely will let something go this late again if she sees you will cover for her. Tell her you are sorry she waited so long, but that she must face the consequences of procrastinating. Follow up to be sure she does finish the project.</p>
<p>A player on the opposing team shoves and trips other players without the referee's notice. In anger, your teenager strikes out and trips the player in full sight of the referee. She argues with the referee and is carded. Her coach suspends her from the next game. Still angry at home, she swears she will quit.</p>	<p>Tell her you want to talk with her after she calms down. Go over what happened in the game, acknowledging the unfairness of the opposing player. Then ask her what she gained by taking revenge. What did it do for her team? Did it punish the offending player? Ask her what would have been a better response in the game. Ask her if she thinks a referee has ever made a mistake in her favor. Suggest she apologize to her coach and the offending player.</p>

Chapter One

7) Practice intervention, not interference.

Challenge	Solution
<p>Your teenager has stopped doing his homework. His grades and behavior are slipping. He is a bright young man with lots of potential. A couple of times you have called a teacher, made excuses, and threatened him into finishing a homework assignment.</p>	<p>Stop making excuses. Ask him why he has let his schoolwork slide. Try to keep an open conversation and listen to what he says. Set up a meeting with teachers and ask how he is doing in class. Is he participating? Is he disruptive? Listen to what suggestions the teacher may offer. Who is he “hanging” with? What do he and his friends do? If you suspect your teenager may be experiencing anxiety or depression, seek the help of a professional. Decide if you want to set up consequences, such as loss of driving privileges or activities, but be prepared that it may not work and accept that he must pay the penalty for neglecting his schoolwork.</p>
<p>Your teenager has the habit of not starting what he finishes. He signs up for a recreation sport but drops out by midseason; you call the coach and make excuses. He angers his school project teammates because he never does his share; you end up doing his part. He signs up for Scout or youth group trips and half the time ends up pulling out; you make his excuses.</p>	<p>Stop covering for your teenager. He needs to take responsibility for his commitments. Make it clear that the next event he signs up for, he must follow through to completion. Consider making him earn at least part of the money to sign up for a sports team or to participate in an organization’s trip. If he wants to quit, tell him he must talk to the coach or the trip leader and explain fully why he is backing out. At that point, he should assume full financial loss for the activity. Refuse to complete his part in school group projects. Let his project mates, and the teacher, do the punishing.</p>

Challenge	Solution
<p>You find evidence of marijuana in your teenager’s backpack. One of his friends’ parents hints that your son has been drinking at parties. You feel out of control and don’t know what to do</p>	<p>This is a definite time for intervention; if you do nothing, he may believe you don’t care. While many teenagers experiment with drugs and alcohol, your teenager also may feel out of control and truly need a “heavy hand” to back out of his situation. Confiscate the evidence and confront your teenager. Instead of lecturing, ask him what the laws are and what dangers he places himself in when he chooses to imbibe. Ask him if he knows what will happen if he is arrested by the police. Ask him what consequences he thinks are appropriate and seriously consider them, but have specific consequences ready.</p>

Remember that success in college involves much more than just academic preparedness. During your teenager’s high school years, look for gaps in her maturity. Keep the communication channels open and analyze poor decisions while praising good ones. Don’t make excuses for your teenager, but let her learn from her mistakes. Provide opportunities where she can talk to adults and grow confident in discussing her ideas. Model compromise and planning, and help her find that path to success.