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Once the shiny, freshness of back to school wears off, students and parents know it's time to get down to business. Particularly for students heading to middle school or high school, the homework assignments become tougher, workloads get heavier and staying ahead of the curve becomes more of a challenge.

As a parent, you may ask, "What is the 'secret behind the A'?" While having effective study skills may be overlooked on the academic journey, we've seen this be the tipping point in making good students into great students. We've compiled a list of 10 good study habits for your tween or teen to help set him or her up for a productive school year.

1. Get Organized. Between homework, tests, and extracurricular activities, it's all too easy for things to slip through the cracks. A planner can help your child keep everything organized. Students should write down assignments, appointments and to-do lists, then review items in the planner at both the beginning and end of the day to stay on track.

2. Know the Expectations. Students shouldn't have any surprises when it comes to how and what they will be graded on. By middle school and high school, most teachers will provide a course outline or syllabus, which can serve as a guide for the semester. If expectations aren't clear, don't wait until a bad report card comes in the mail. Your student should feel comfortable approaching teachers with questions about grading and assignments at any time. If this is not the case, it may be time for you as a parent to step in.

3. Designate a Study Area. Yes, studying at the local coffee shop may seem like a good idea, but not if there are constantly people interrupting or other disruptions. Even at home, studying in front of the TV won't be the best use of your son or daughter's time. Help your child by providing a quiet, well-lit, low-traffic space for study time. Take it one step further and institute a "communications blackout" policy with no cell phones or social media allowed until schoolwork is done.

4. Develop a Study Plan. First things first: students need to know when a test will take place, the types of questions that will be included and the topics that will be covered. From there, your student should create a study plan and allow ample time to prepare – there's nothing worse than cramming the night before an exam. You can help by buying a wall calendar and asking him or her to assign topics and tasks for each day leading up to a due date or exam. Setting goals for each session is also key to success. If your child needs some help developing a study plan, our [study skills program](#) is a great resource! Our tutors will work with your child to develop an individualized plan that fits his or her needs, while instilling effective time management tips and organizational skills.

5. Think Positively. Being in the right mindset can make all the difference. Encourage your child to think positively when studying or heading into an exam and by all means, avoid catastrophic thinking. Help

your student turn negative statements like, “I’ll never have enough time to get a good grade on this exam,” into positive ones like, “I began preparing later than I should have but I put together a comprehensive study plan and will be able to get through the material prior to the exam.”

6. Create a Study Group. Working in groups can help students when they’re struggling to understand a concept and can enable them to complete assignments more quickly than when working alone. Keep groups small and structured to ensure the maximum benefit to participants and reduce distractions.

7. Practice Active Listening. It’s important for students to concentrate and avoid distractions when an instructor is presenting. Some tips to share with your child include: try concentrating on the main points being made, think about what the speaker is saying and pay attention to how things are said (gestures, tone of voice, etc.). They should avoid talking or thinking about problems when listening. If a teacher says, “This is important” or “I’ll write this on the board,” there’s a good chance students will see the concept on an exam.

8. Review Test-Taking Strategies. It is normal for your son or daughter to feel stressed when taking an exam. However, there are certain strategies that will help him or her manage the stress and do his or her best on the exam. First, make sure that your child arrives on time and tries to stay relaxed. Students should be sure to read all of the directions on the exam and pace themselves so as not to feel rushed. You can let your child know that it’s OK to skip around on a test, if allowed, as he or she may be more comfortable with certain topics than others.

9. Read Actively. It’s all too easy for students to skim over an assigned book chapter and not know the main points of what they just read. Help your student to practice active reading by asking him or her to note the main idea of each passage and look up unfamiliar words or concepts. Make an outline of the chapter or create flow charts and diagrams that help map out the concept at hand. After each section, have students write a summary in their own words and come up with possible exam questions.

10. Look to the Future. For some students, college may seem like an intangible event in the very distant future, but in reality, it isn’t so far off. Starting early can be an immense help in [navigating the college admissions process](#). Be sure to get organized, set goals with your child and have regular check-ins to assess progress.