

11 Things Your High School Student Needs From You

By Heather Stoll

We love the idea of a fresh start. There is something about the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start anew that stirs up hope and optimism—and an unusual desire to purchase a new calendar!

High school provides not only a fresh start academically but also the promise of a fresh start personally. The high school years are unlike any other season in life. Students mature at a breakneck speed and experience a multitude of “firsts” and “milestones”—driving a car, going on a date, traveling independently, making decisions about college and career, and much more.

During the four years of high school, your awkward, insecure teenager will graduate into a young adult, armed with a high school diploma and society’s permission to begin the rest of their life. This season is not the time to coast in your parenting. It is not an opportunity to relax. Instead, it is time to sharpen your focus and take your game to the next level. As much as you want your student to succeed, you also need to finish well in your parenting journey. With that in mind, below are eleven things your high school student needs from you.

AFFIRMATION

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. High school students need plenty of it. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your student is loved, smart, creative, capable, hard-working, and pretty (or handsome). Don’t neglect affirmation of their appearance. Although your emphasis should be on their inner self, high school students struggle with how they look and appear.

In our social media-saturated society, they are constantly comparing themselves to others and bearing the brunt of that scrutiny from their peers. They need to be affirmed in this area as it can be a significant source of insecurity.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement tells your student to try something new, join a club, try out for the team, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend. Encouragement says to them to keep trying when things get hard, provide comfort when they encounter failure, and cheer on the sideline whether they win or lose.

ACCEPTANCE

Although closely related, acceptance is not the same as affirmation. Affirmation speaks to your student’s identity. Acceptance reminds them of your love and approval. High School offers the chance

for students to explore who they are and who they want to be—and it's not just fashion choices and hairstyles.

Your student may have played sports for six years, but has now decided to join the marching band. Your shy, awkward introvert has declared his candidacy for freshman class president. The middle schooler who did not care about grades has now added two academic classes to be more serious about their studies.

Your student needs to know that you accept them and love them regardless of their club activities or high school stereotype. They need to know you love and accept them for who they are.

CONSISTENCY

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done.

Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to high school drama and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family. It also reflects in adherence to rules and boundaries, such as curfews, technology limits, or attendance at family functions. Don't allow your parenting insecurities and fears to express themselves through shifting standards or exaggerated rules.

INDEPENDENCE

High school students yearn for independence, but often seem unprepared for it. Many parents make the mistake of granting total freedom at a certain age or after a student passes a significant milestone. Independence is not something achieved, but rather a collection of skills that should be gradually built and taught.

The gift of independence is one of the most valuable assets in your parenting portfolio. Start early with an area of strength for your student. Do they love the outdoors? Let them take care of the lawn (and that of a few neighbors!) Do they like to cook? Assign to them one or two nights a month to prepare the family meal (including shopping and budgeting). Do they long for more freedom in their driving? Let them handle the weekly errands for the family.

Build on those skills and then expand to other areas. Celebrate their successes. Use the failures as growing moments. Students don't know what they don't know. It's your job to teach them.





VISION

Vision takes the focus off events of today (or this week or even this year) and points to the bigger picture and purpose of their life. In high school, it is easy to get hyper-focused on one test or assignment, one dropped football pass, or one missed opportunity.

By casting vision for your student, you help them put events in the right perspective and teach them to approach challenges with confidence, failures with faith, and new experiences with expectation.

ENGAGEMENT

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, clothing choices, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management.

It is participation in a relationship in which you invest time and attention. It is walking alongside your student and experiencing life with them. Engagement communicates interest and requires creativity and often a willingness to stay up late!

INVOLVEMENT

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your student will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. But, involvement matters.

There is no substitute for being there. When your student looks up and sees you in the stands, the theater, or the back of the room, you tell them they are a priority and what they do is important to you. It is an investment in your relationship that will reap the rewards for years to come and build credibility for your parenting. Could there be a better use of your time and attention?

FORGIVENESS

Everyone makes mistakes. High school students make more than the average human. That's why forgiveness is an integral part of parenting a high school student. Forgiveness does not mean that you overlook bad choices or forgo punishment or shield your student from consequences. It does mean that you give them another chance. And another. And another.

You don't hold their mistakes against them, leverage them for compliance, or weaponize them for your gain. You love, forgive, teach, and repeat.

PERMISSION TO REST

The pressure felt by the average high school student would cripple most adults. They study to earn excellent grades and test scores to gain admission into college. They participate in activities to bolster their resume and play on a team to win a championship. They find a job to gain experience and learn how to budget money. They volunteer in the community to catalog service hours, craft beautiful and clever Insta-stories to maintain a good online image, and the list goes on. Do you know what your high school student needs from you?

Permission to rest. Reassurance that it's okay to take a day off. It's also a good idea to throw in an occasional coffee date, a dance party in the kitchen, and a few extra hours of sleep on a morning when they need it.

PRAYER

Prayer is not the last thing your high school student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of the last things you do before you close your eyes to sleep. Prayer is the over-arching theme of the entire high school parenting journey.



Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces intense peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test or a date, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him.

You see, prayer is not just something your high school student needs from you. It is something you need, too.

Heather Stoll has more than 20 years of ministry experience, predominantly in the area of communications and media. She has served churches in South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee, alongside her husband, Jeff. Together, they have two children, and they currently reside in Saint Augustine, FL.