

Ninth grade—Stepping up into the world of high school

High school is a whole new world. Are you and your ninth grader ready?

Important things to know about— Making a smooth move into high school

- What to expect from 9th graders.
- Making the most of high-school opportunities.
- Teenagers and work.

What's going on with your ninth-grader?

The chart on the back page gives an overview of what's going on in your child's development this year and next. Ninth grade is a time of confusion and major adjustments. Stay calm! Stay patient! Find new ways to be present and connected in your teen's life—that matters more now than ever before, even though kids this age are giving a pretty good “go away and leave me alone” display. Your attention and support and love are still essential.

What's in a high school anyway?

How is high school different from the middle school your child just left? What new challenges are there to adjust to—and what new programs and services might be available?

High school is a place where teens can learn to focus on who they are—and where they can get the knowledge and practice the skills they will need to become fulfilled, competent, independent adults.

Think of high school as a great big resource center that offers a menu of courses, programs, and services for your child. Now—early in the ninth grade year—is a good time to look around and see what's located where in your child's high school.

Not all schools will have all of these programs and services, but check out what is available at your high

school, talk about it with your children, and ask them which of the opportunities they think they might need or might be interested in:

Special programs can include English as a Second Language instruction (ESL), Advanced Placement classes, Running Start, Tech Prep (*see back page*), and resources for students with special needs.

Curriculum comes in three basic flavors:

- Academic subjects like English, science, math, social studies;
- Technical and vocational fields like computers, drafting, auto shop, business; and
- “Electives” which offer your child a chance to explore a wide variety of topics for general interest.

Guidance services usually include aptitude testing, academic counseling (which classes to take), career planning, college-choice counseling, etc.

Community connections may include community-service activities, internships and work experience, job shadowing, and volunteer opportunities.

Self-development opportunities may include work on the student newspaper or yearbook; honor society; leadership opportunities; peer tutoring; and student government.

Activities can include clubs, performing arts (music, drama, dance), sports and cheer team, etc. If there isn't already a club for the topic or activity that your child is interested in, maybe your child can start one. At most schools it only takes a few students and a willing teacher or staff member. I know of some students who talked their English teacher into sponsoring a “Tuesday Lunch Hour Instant Poetry Club” one year. They had a great time!

Jobs that work for teenagers

A lot of ninth graders are looking forward to finding jobs so they can earn money of their own. And many parents believe that weekend and after-school jobs can help teach kids discipline and responsibility. But not all teen jobs are such a great idea. Let these guidelines help you decide whether a job is right for your child:

- The work is 15 or fewer hours per week.
- The job is meaningful work that relates to your teen’s interests and future goals.
- Your teen learns more than she earns—that is, the job gives her chances to learn and practice valuable skills.
- Your teen saves at least 25% of what he earns—and says “no” to credit-card offers!
- The work is legal and safe.

Not working more than 15 hours a week is a key point. For one thing, your teen needs time, energy, and rest to succeed in school. For another, there are dangers in too much work at this age: Studies show that teens who work more than 20 hours a week are more likely to use alcohol and drugs and smoke cigarettes; they are more likely to be sexually active, and more likely to be emotionally distressed than teens who don’t work or work fewer hours. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997) So talk to your teenager about the risks as well as the benefits of taking that after-school job.

Did you know? Your student can earn college credit while still in high school!

Advanced Placement—after completing an AP class at the high school, students can take a test and may earn college credits in that subject.

College in the high school—qualified students earn both high school and college credit for successfully finishing certain enriched and challenging classes at the high school.

Running Start—qualified juniors and seniors can earn both high school and college credits for classes taken at local community colleges.

Tech Prep—after HS graduation, students can get community/technical college credit for certain professional and technical classes taken at the high school.

DEVELOPMENTAL OVERVIEW OF THE HIGH-SCHOOL YEARS

	9th Grade	10th Grade
Physical	Girls are ahead of boys in physical maturity; sexual energy is increasing. <i>Do I look right? Do I dress right? Am I normal or am I weird?</i>	Boys are beginning to catch up. Anything within normal is OK; anything not normal is terrible. Boys are concerned with “bulking up.” Girls are concerned with body image and may start to develop eating disorders. Lots of sexual energy.
Mental / Academic	Getting better at abstract thinking. Need new ways of relating to teachers. Still need to work on organization, study skills, etc., for HS level work.	Getting into the swing of HS schoolwork. Still unsure about how to relate to adults. <i>How much does school-work really matter to me?</i>
Social	HS has many new people and new groups. 9th graders anxious about finding their new places in HS social structures. <i>Who do I talk to? Who do I sit with at lunch? Where do I fit in?</i>	Social groups shifting—natural groupings vs. shared interests. Decisions about joining groups (e.g., “party scene”). <i>I have people to hang out with, but are they real friends? What group am I part of/do I want to be part of?</i>
Friendships	Anxiety about finding new friends. Looking for people to hang around with. Groups form based on similarities. <i>Will I make new friends? Will I/should I keep old friends?</i>	Concern about friends and friendships. Friends increasingly important as family relationships shift. <i>Life would be super if only I had a boyfriend/girlfriend.</i>
Personal Identity	Self-consciousness. Grief and loneliness about loss of middle school self. Confused identity (compared to MS). Sexual identity taking shape. <i>Who am I really?</i>	Concern about identity, especially sexuality. Extreme self-consciousness. <i>Who am I, other than not my parents? Am I in charge of myself? Do I like what I am?</i>
Family Relationships	Starting to feel need for new relationships with parents. New look at past family events. More talking with friends about family situations.	Can’t wait to get driver’s license. Starting serious re-negotiation of parent’s roles. Much more talking with friends about parent and family issues.

Based on Michael Riera, Ph.D., *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*, 2004.