

REAL-LIFE

Survival Guide

From managing money, shopping, and housekeeping, high schoolers need to learn how to be independent. Whether your child plans to go to college or get a job after high school, she'll be more successful if she knows what to expect and begins to prepare now.

Here are ideas to help her get ready for life on her own.



MONEY BASICS

Knowing how to manage money and be a savvy consumer are important skills for life. Try these suggestions for helping your child learn to handle personal finances:



▲ Let your teen see your household budget (rent or mortgage, utilities, phone, car, food, insurance, entertainment). Discuss what portion of your income goes for each category. Then, help her figure out the kind of budget she will need for living on her own.

▲ Encourage your child to get a part-time job while he's in high school. Suggest that he come up with a plan for his earnings. He can use a portion to pay for his expenses (gas, car insurance, meals with friends), a portion to save up for bigger purchases (new sneakers, an MP3 player), and a portion to save for the future.

▲ Have your teenager open a checking account. Remind her to enter all transactions, including deposits, ATM withdrawals, and debits. Show her how to balance a checkbook, and insist that she do it each month. *Note:* Setting up online banking will enable her to keep track of her balance daily.

▲ Talk with your teen about credit cards. They can help him establish credit so he can get a car loan or an apartment someday. But be sure he realizes how easy it is to overspend

and rack up debt. *Idea:* Ask him to figure the difference between paying \$39.99 in cash for something and making three payments of \$14.99 each (\$44.97).

▲ Consider starting your child with a credit card tied to your account. You can set a spending limit and require that she be able to pay off the bill in full each month. Or you might have her get a debit card for her checking account. She'll become accustomed to using "plastic," but she won't be able to spend more than she has.

▲ Teach your child to be a smart shopper. Encourage him to compare prices among stores and also online. Remind him that online purchases usually carry a shipping fee, so he needs to compare that to the cost of the gas it would take for him to go to a store to shop. *Tip:* He might try an online comparison shopping site like www.bizrate.com.

▲ Help your teen learn how to protect herself against identity theft—criminals can target teens as well as adults. Explain that she should never give out bank account numbers or other personal information to someone who calls. When online, she should type this information only into secure Web sites from companies she knows, and she should never put it in e-mails.



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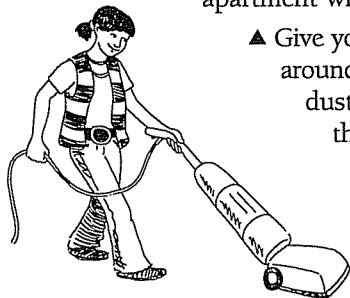
SHOPPING AND COOKING

Grocery shopping and cooking are not only a part of day-to-day life, they're essential to healthy eating and living. Try these tips:

- ▲ Have your high schooler make a grocery list on the computer, print out a copy each week, and check the refrigerator and pantry to see what you need. Remind him that having a list in hand makes shopping go more quickly, cuts back on forgotten items, and holds costs down.
- ▲ Take your teen along when you go food shopping, and eventually have her do some of your household shopping herself. At the store, encourage her to read nutrition labels. Ask her to find the apple juice with the most vitamin C or the cereal with the most fiber, for example.
- ▲ Get your high schooler involved in planning and preparing meals, too. Put him in charge of one part of dinner (salad, vegetable). Or have him make dinner one or two nights a week. Suggest that he double recipes and freeze the extra for another night. Once he's on his own, he'll appreciate having a meal to pull out of the freezer after school or work.
- ▲ Try to keep fast food and unhealthy carryout meals to a minimum—you'll set a model for your child to follow. Discuss how this food tends to have more fat, sodium, and calories. Plus, with careful shopping, she'll be able to save money by making meals at home.

HOUSEKEEPING AND MAINTENANCE

Help your teen get ready to move into a dorm room or an apartment with these ideas:



- ▲ Give your teenager regular chores around the house. She might vacuum, dust, take out the trash, or sort the recycling. Show her how a household has tasks that are daily (making beds), weekly (changing sheets), or "sometimes" (flipping mattresses).
- ▲ Make your child responsible for his own laundry. Also, insist that he clean up after his own snacks, clear dishes from the table, and wash dishes or put them in the dishwasher as

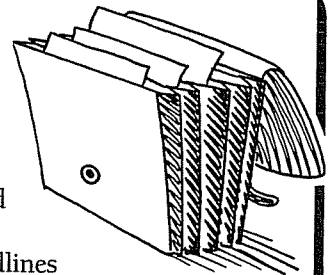


- he uses them. If he gets used to cleaning up after himself now, it will be a habit by the time he's living on his own.
- ▲ Help your teen begin to gather items she'll need when she leaves home. *Examples:* towels, dishes, silverware, cookware, cleaning supplies, tools, a first-aid kit. She might find these items at yard sales, thrift stores, on www.freecycle.com (sign up for a free account), or through hand-me-downs from you or other relatives.
- ▲ Teach your teenager how to do simple, everyday tasks like ironing or sewing on a button. As you do minor jobs around the house (hang a picture, fix a leaky faucet), have him watch—and then do it himself the next time.
- ▲ Let your child handle car maintenance, too. Whether she has her own car or uses yours, she can check the oil, replace the windshield wipers, fill the gas tank, check the tire pressure, and keep the car clean.

ORGANIZING PAPERS

When your teenager is on his own, he will need to keep track of important documents. Help him get a start now:

- If your teen is planning on college, suggest that he file college brochures, applications, and essays for each school in a separate folder, with application deadlines written on the front. He can put his high school transcript, ACT/SAT scores, and a list of activities (sports, clubs, community service) in other folders.
- Have your youngster create a job-search folder with her resume and letters of recommendation from volunteer leaders, coaches, or teachers. As she applies for jobs, she might jot down the position and date she applied on a sheet of paper and add it to the folder.
- Once your teen moves out, encourage him to keep important documents (birth certificate, medical records, tax forms) in an accordion folder. He can store the folder in a desk drawer where he can easily find it.



High School Years