

# 7 Life Skills Your Teen Should Learn Before Moving Out

Have you been doing everything for your teen? Here's why it's time to stop

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Family  
(February 15, 2016)



(Photo: eurobanks/Shutterstock)

Some parents do just about everything for their teens, from laundry to making appointments to waking them up in time for the bus and even arguing with teachers when they issue a bad grade. But are we raising a generation of helpless kids through overprotectiveness and “overparenting”? Some experts argue yes. And those kids may run into trouble when it’s time to leave the nest.

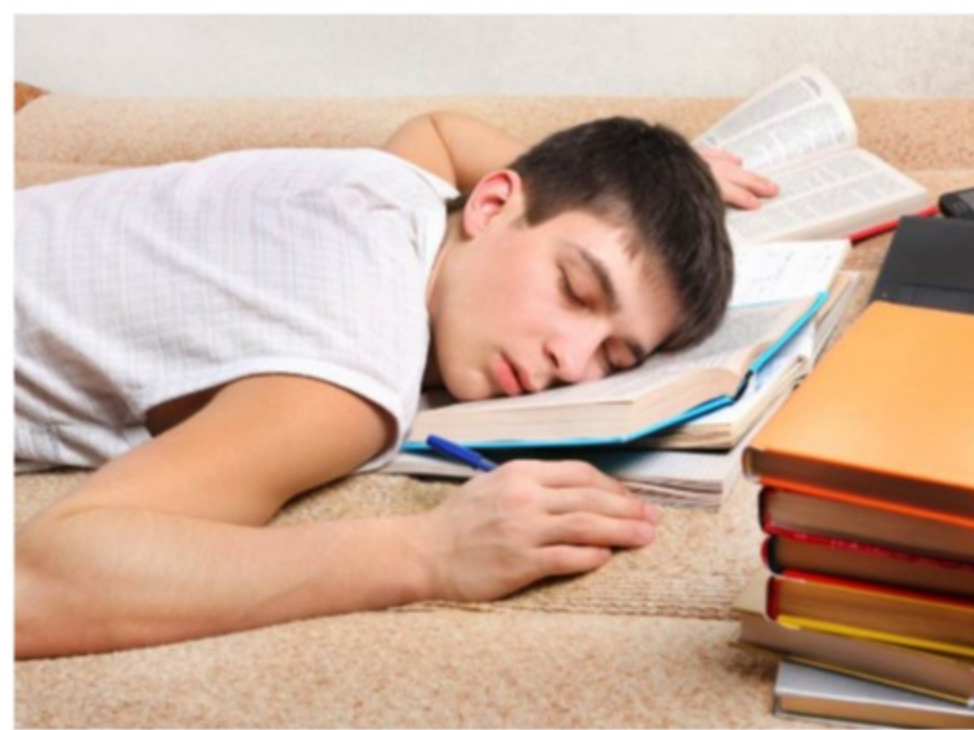
Ninety percent of college students who visit their college counseling center show up because **they’re experiencing anxiety**, in many cases because they lack the skills to manage their lives, says Barbara Greenberg, PhD, teen clinical psychologist and author of “Teenage as a Second Language: A Parent’s Guide to Becoming Bilingual.” “Every year I see more students coming home from college because they can’t tolerate it,” Greenberg says.

When your teen heads to college across the country or an apartment across town, he’ll need the skills to handle everyday tasks without your help: cooking, calling the doctor and, more generally, the ability to figure out things he doesn’t know.

You can start teaching the skills he’ll need now. He won’t learn everything before leaving home, but he’ll have a head start.

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**Healthy habits.** Teens should understand the **importance of sleep**, exercise and nutrition. “It sounds simple,” Greenberg says, “but I see kids operating on four hours of sleep, **gaining the freshman 15** and not exercising. Before you can do anything well, you have to have healthy habits.”



Also, teach healthy self-soothing skills for managing disappointment, such as going for a run, walking with a friend or yoga. Greenberg says teens don’t handle disappointment well these days, which contributes to anxiety. (Photo: Sabphoto/Shutterstock)

**Organization.** Many parents serve as alarm clocks and maintain kids’ calendars, but high schoolers should track their own schedules, including making lists and noting deadlines and appointments in a smartphone or notebook, Greenberg says. College academic advisers say time management in college is a huge hurdle for many. So let teens organize, even if they drop the ball.



**Negotiating conflict.** Whether dealing with a thoughtless roommate or an **unclear boss**, teens need to learn to have uncomfortable conversations. “Negotiating conflict on their own is a skill that will take them far,” Greenberg says. When we handle things for our kids, they learn to avoid situations that feel difficult. So let your teen handle talking to her coach, teacher or boss. (Photo: auremar/Shutterstock)

**Creating a support network.** Young adults need to know when to call on an expert, whether a doctor, computer technician, **car mechanic** or professor. They also will fare better if they have a couple of close friends they can open up to, Greenberg says, rather than rely on a sea of acquaintances.

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**Phone skills.** Teens need practice talking on the phone. Seems simple to you, but not so much to a **generation of texters**. “I’ve seen teens be very, very anxious about using the phone, but you may not be able to email a doctor to make an appointment,” Greenberg says. Have teens practice by ordering the family’s to-go meal by phone and making their own doctor and dentist appointments. If they get sick in college — and they will — they’ll need to contact the student health clinic without you.

**Money basics.** Teens should know how to reconcile their checking account and understand budget basics. Explain how health insurance works, what a co-pay is and the nuts and bolts of **credit cards** (if he will be getting one). (Photo: racorn/Shutterstock)



**Household chores.** Teens should not only understand how to run a washing machine, but how to fold clothes and put them away. **Have your child sweep the floor**, clean a bathroom, cook breakfast for the family or go to the grocery store for you. “Kids need to experience mastery while at home,” Greenberg says.



They may grumble, but the more tasks teens handle, the more competent they’ll feel when they move out. Competence begets confidence. So ask yourself these questions:

- Is this a skill my child will need when I’m not there?
- Would my child be able to do this without me there?

If the answer to the second question is no, it’s time to teach the skill. Your child will thank you later. (Photo: Jeanette Dietl/Shutterstock)

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