



How Parents Can Best Support Their Child through the HSC

Kathryn Hardcastle *(B.Ed, Dip. Transformational Life Coaching, Dip. Holistic Counselling and Life Care)*

There is no doubt that Year 12 will possibly be one of the most difficult periods of your child's life. Not only is this a stressful time for young men and women, parents also tend to ride a roller coaster of emotions throughout this 12 months. While we can't sit their exams for them, there are things we can do to reduce their pressures and help them achieve their best!

This guide will cover the most important aspects of supporting your child through this turbulent year and will conclude with a checklist of Do's and Don'ts for future reference. Each area has practical suggestions that have been tested over the years and are endorsed by counsellors and psychologists alike.

A Team Approach

The formula for success in the HSC is when parents, children and teachers all work together towards the same goals. It's important to remember that your child's teachers will be attempting to help out in as many ways as they can. In almost all cases, they're happy to talk to you or your child about issues that might arise in the year. Schools prefer it when you get in touch before a problem arises and, usually, issues can be worked out quickly and positively.

Some specific ways to assist may be to cook them their favourite food, do their washing and ensure they have a private, quiet space to study. Read their English play with them, proofread their essays, and listen to their oral presentations with their permission of course!



For more information, go to www.hscintheholidays.com.au

Stay informed

The best way to help your child through Year 12 is to be as informed as possible. This seems obvious, but many parents ignore the various opportunities for involvement that schools or universities offer. Attend information evenings with your child as they give you a chance to meet the staff, hear first hand what's being said, ask questions and, of course, enable you to talk to your child in an informed way.

It also tells them that you care about them. Remember to attend parent-teacher evenings throughout the year – these are invaluable opportunities to talk honestly with your child's teachers.



**“That best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered
acts of kindness and of love.”**

William Wordsworth

Health and wellbeing

As parents, this is one of the areas that we can offer practical support and assistance. Make sure they eat properly, get enough sleep, continue playing sport and don't spend every minute studying or, at the other end, don't socialise so much that they can't complete assignments.

Stress can be a major part of this year for your child – and you – so try to keep the house as calm as possible. It's helpful if all family members are aware of the challenges Year 12 brings and support the child going through it. Often you might find that irrational behaviour can be a cry for help so support rather than punishment is a good idea.

Unfortunately, during stressful times, some teenagers can suffer more than their parents realise. Keep a gentle eye out for substance abuse. Watch for changes in behaviour, mood swings and weight loss or gain. If you do become worried, speak to someone at school and your child. Don't ignore it. However hard it is for you, try to keep the communication channels open at all times.

A balanced approach

A student who maintains a balanced life for the year is in the best position to succeed. It isn't necessary for them to give up going to the movies or playing sport. Your best bet is to discuss realistic limits on non-study activities. From advice given to by previously high-achieving students, social networks such as Facebook should be limited, or even removed during the lead up to examinations.

Be realistic

Success in the HSC requires a number of factors to be in balance. Firstly your child's self-expectations must be in balance with their abilities. Unrealistic expectations set the young person up for failure and stress. It is also very important for parent's expectations to be realistic and in line with their child's previously demonstrated abilities.

By Year 12, some students have a clear idea about the sort of life and job they want— they have goals and, providing these are realistic, they'll most likely achieve them. On the other hand, there are many students who don't have a clue about what they want to do can find the final year especially hard. This can lead to them being unfocused and less motivated to study.

If this sounds like your child, there are steps that can be taken to help them through. Most schools offer career counselling which profiles your child's interests and strengths in order to suggest the most appropriate career pathways. Armed with some idea of where they're headed, it can be much easier for them to make smart choices. As their parent, you have a unique awareness of their interests, so it can be helpful for you to discuss their career aspirations with them, too

In Summary

Practical, loving support will make the year easier for your child: if they're happier, you will be, too. We all want our children to be contented, successful and to achieve their best. However it's important to let them know that what happens this year will not necessarily determine the rest of their lives. There are other options and pathways available to students that can still allow them to achieve their goals.

What you should NOT do to your child during their HSC year:

- ≠ Do not continually nag and complain to your child. This has been identified as a major student stressor.
- ≠ Do not remind your sons and daughters that their entire lives depend on this year.
- ≠ Do not continually detail the nature and extent of the financial sacrifice that you have made for them to be at their particular school.
- ≠ Do not tell them what great marks you or their siblings got!



Checklist: How to best support your child during their HSC

- Aim to build a support network of teachers, friends and families around your child for guidance and a helping hand.
- Talk to your child! Keep the lines of communication open at all times (especially during the most stressful).
- Stay informed by attending and speaking to teachers/ university representatives, etc.
- Negotiate your expectations around study, free time and leisure activities. This may require some flexibility on your part.
- Celebrate successes throughout the year. This can be as simple as improving the result in a task or achieving a short-term goal.
- Aim to reduce the family stressors on your child, especially around examination time.
- Be realistic as to what your son/daughter may be able to achieve in the HSC.
- Provide as much practical, loving support as you can!

“Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible — the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.”

Virginia Satir