

# TIPS FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, & CAREGIVERS: TEENS & ADOLESCENTS

## *How to Prioritize PDF: Playtime, Downtime, and Family Time*

The research is clear: adolescents need playtime, downtime, and family time (PDF) every day for healthy development.

Below are some suggestions for ways to proactively incorporate PDF into schedules in order to support well-being.



### PLAYTIME

Play is not just for younger children. Research suggests that play – especially when it is freely chosen, unstructured, and personally-directed – is linked to increased cognitive skills, physical health, self-regulation, language abilities, social skills, and empathy. “Playtime” for teens means having the autonomy to freely choose activities that they enjoy, such as spending time with friends, exercising, or doing a creative project.

- **Make sure there is enough time in the day for social connections in person and to pursue hobbies and interests just for fun.**
- **Spend time outdoors – alone or with peers – taking a walk, shooting hoops, or just sitting outside to get some fresh air.**



### DOWNTIME

Downtime is time set aside beyond structured activities or academics to relax, reflect, or just be. Research suggests that teens need downtime throughout the day – and enough sleep at night – for their physical and emotional health.

- **Prioritize getting enough sleep (8–10 hours a night). Not getting enough sleep has serious consequences for learning, health, safety – including driving and emotional regulation.**
- **Take breaks during the day. Even 30 minutes after school to listen to music, read, or play a video game can help teens to “reset” for the next part of their day.**



### FAMILY TIME

Family time creates a sense of connection and belonging, and “family” can be defined in many ways, including people who love and support you who may or may not be blood relatives. Research shows that when adolescents are part of a family unit that spends time together, they are more likely to feel supported, safe, and loved unconditionally, as well as have increased self-esteem and better academic outcomes. Having a strong tie with one’s cultural background and/or racial or ethnic identity has also been shown to be a protective factor for students at the margins.

- **Strive to gather the family for 20–25 minutes at least 5 times per week (i.e., family meals, outings, and game/movie nights).**
- **Participate in organizing and doing family service projects, traditions, rituals, or activities.**

## SCREENTIME TIPS



- Limit screen time & preview/co-view age-appropriate content
- Avoid media 30–60 min. before bedtime & put screens away at night
- Model healthy media use. Unplug during meals, before bedtime, and during family activities.

