

How to Drop Out of High School

Dropping out of high school is a serious decision that many people may regret later in their life. A high school diploma is required for many jobs and college attendance. However, if you are sure that dropping out is the best decision for...

Part 1 of 4:

Understanding Your Motivation

1.



Assess the reason you want to drop out. Knowing why you want to drop out can help you decide whether it is really the best path and can help you decide what to do. Some common reasons for dropping out are:^[1]

1. A lack of intellectual stimulation. If you find high school to be too easy and you are bored, you may be tempted to drop out and start college or vocational training early.
2. Feeling unprepared and behind. If you feel as though high school is too difficult, you have missed too much content to ever catch up, or no one will support you, you may be tempted to leave high school and give up on your education.
3. Having other responsibilities. If you are unexpectedly becoming a parent, have an ailing family member, or have to work to support your family, you may feel that dropping out of high school is your only option so that you have time to work.

2.



Ask about other options first. See your guidance counselor or a teacher that you trust and tell them your situation. There may be a solution to your complaint that does not involve dropping out:

1. If you are experiencing a lack of intellectual stimulation, you may be able to take more challenging classes.^[2] Some schools that do not offer advanced-level courses on-site may have relationships with colleges or with online-based institutions. You may even be able to dual-enroll and complete an Associate's Degree and your high school diploma at the same time.
2. If you are feeling unprepared and behind, you might have to work really hard to catch up if you are behind. The good news is that there are likely educators at your school that will work with you and help you, particularly if they know that you are considering dropping out. Ask about credit recovery, offer classroom labor (like cleaning or organizing) in exchange for tutoring, and find out what work can be made up.
3. If you have other responsibilities, talk to your guidance counselor about them. You may be able to do a work program that earns both money and school credit. Your counselor may also know of financial resources that could help you financially while keeping you in school. Remember that a high school graduate's lifetime income is 50%-100% higher than someone who drops out,^[3] so dropping out may not be the best long-term solution for your family.

3.



Do not drop out for someone else. If someone else—a parent, a friend, or a significant other—is pressuring you to drop out, tell them to stop. This is a decision that only you can make. This decision could have a long-ranging impact on your life, so you need to feel confident in your convictions.

Part 2 of 4:

Deciding to Drop Out

1.



Form a reasonable argument. You will have to explain your decision many times, to many different people. Before you have those conversations, be sure that you can make a reasoned, clear argument for taking the path that you are taking.

1. For example, 'I am not being served by this educational system. I am not challenged, interested, or inspired by the curriculum or the educators. I am choosing to drop out of high school so that I can pursue higher education on my own and find an educational institution that fits my academic goals.'
2. For example, 'I am choosing to drop out because I feel like I have no other choice. To make up the work and education I missed by being absent for so many days, I would have to attend school for another year. My grades are so low that I may not be eligible for a diploma even if I do all of the work I am supposed to do. I will be much better off if I can just leave, get my GED, and start working.'
3. For example, 'I am choosing to leave school so that I can work full-time. While this decision may not make sense to you, I know the needs of myself and my family, and having the money to feed my family and myself is more important than learning about academic things that may never affect my life.'



Ask about alternative high schools. Many school districts offer an alternative or independent high school. This is often a school with more flexible times and a different mindset. The students who attend alternative high schools can be more mature and often work.

1. If much of your complaint about high school is the environment and the students, an alternative high school may be a better fit for you.
2. Alternative high schools will sometimes allow you to accelerate your courses and finish early.

3.



Make a plan for your future. Before you set the dropping out plan in motion, you should know what you are going to do instead of high school. You most likely will try to get a GED or high school equivalency. It is important to do this as soon as possible, while you are still in 'school mode.'

1. If you plan to leave high school to start college or a vocational program, be sure you can enter the program you wish to enter with a high school equivalency.
2. If you are planning to go to work full time, be sure you have a job lined up first. Find out how many hours you will be able to work and ask about benefits like health and dental insurance.

4.



Anticipate others' arguments. The best way to be ready to answer the questions and handle the 'are you sure?' responses that you will likely get from the adults in your life is to anticipate their questions before they ask them. Try to preview the conversations before they happen and come up with responses to arguments and questions that will likely be asked.

5.



Talk to your guardians. Even if you are 18 and can legally make your own decision, it is considerate to tell the people who have been responsible for you up to this point what decision you are making (preferably before you make it official). Tell them your reasons, but don't expect them to necessarily agree right away. It may take some time for the idea to sink in, and they may never think it is a good idea. But if you are clear and firm, they will likely respect your decision.

1. Have a back-up plan in place. The worst-case scenario is that your guardians may kick you out of the house if you drop out. If you think this may happen, have somewhere to go (at least temporarily).

6.



Tell your guidance counselor. Visit your guidance counselor and tell him/her your plans. Be sure to present him/her with your reasoning, your plans for the future, and your guardians' response to your decision (even if it wasn't favorable).

Researching the Legal Requirements

1.



Determine the legal age for leaving school. Every state is a little different, so make sure you know at what age you're legally allowed to quit school. Some states allow students to drop out at 16, while others will not allow you to make that decision until you're 18. Though you can drop out with a legal guardian's consent if you're younger than the established age in some states, other states will not allow you to drop out before the age of 18, even *with* your guardian's consent. Make sure you know this information before dropping out.^[4]

1. You can find your state's legal age requirements here.

2.



Don't just stop going to school. Even though you're considered a drop-out if you just stop going to school altogether, the action of doing so without consulting the proper legal channels can have legal ramifications for you and your legal guardians^[5].

1. Simply no longer attending school is referred to as truancy in legal terms. It can lead to fines and community service for you and/or your legal guardians.
2. Becoming truant may stand in your way of receiving a high school equivalency.

3.



Understand the testing requirements for drop-outs in your state. In some states, you might be allowed to legally leave school early if your legal guardians agree *and* if you pass a High School equivalency test or get a GED. Make sure to research if your state adopts this policy.^[6]

4.



Talk to your guidance counselor or administrative advisor about the required paperwork. Each state and school district has different forms that you and your parents need to fill out. Make sure to consult with the appropriate person at your school to find out which documents need to be filed and when they have to

be returned.

1. Be aware that your guidance counselor may try to talk you out of your decision. Be prepared to offer your reasons for making your decision and be confident in your decision.

Part 4 of 4:

Considering High School Alternatives

1.



Consider online schools and home schooling. These options, if pursued with a measure of dedication, will earn you a diploma while allowing you to do it at your own pace and without the social encumbrances associated with high school.

2.



Think about work-study programs. This could be a great option that you can work on with your school's staff. If there's a particular field of work you're interested in, you might consider a work-study program. Not only would you be able to finish school, but you might end up graduating with job options^[7].

3.



Consider Gateway Programs, and Junior/Community Colleges. You might also look into early admission into Junior/Community College through a Gateway Program at your school. If you have enough credits, certain High Schools will allow you to transfer to a Community/Junior College.

4.



Think about what you'd like to do for a living. If you've decided that any kind of academic environment is wrong for you, you might want to start thinking about technical career paths.

5.



Get a GED (or Certificate of High School Proficiency). A GED (General Education Development), often referred to a high school-equivalency degree, is an exam that you can take to show employers that you have the education of someone with a high school diploma without having to go to school.^[8]

1. A Certificate of High School Proficiency is something awarded by the California Department of Education to students who pass the California High School Proficiency exam (CHSPE). While the GED is meant for those 17 and up who've dropped out, the California program is meant for teenagers in the 10th grade or aged 16+.

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