

# How to spot the VCE danger signs

Doors are slammed, there are long agonised conversations on the phone and it seems that your 17 year-old is on a constant emotional roller-coaster.

Is it the end of the first love affair? Possibly.  
Fury at a favourite football team losing a match that should have been a dead cert? Maybe.  
Or is it the normal observation of a parent of a VCE student? Definitely.

One of the hardest parts of VCE on the home front is working out exactly what the role of the parent is during this final year.

One trap is the A-word: ambition. Their ambitions may be totally different from yours, and you can really get them offside by saying the wrong thing.

Pointing out how successful Uncle John is because he worked really hard during the VCE is unlikely to impress.

Your role is to take a step back and let them have some independence. They need to learn how to manage their workload, so sit back and provide support when it is asked for rather than hounding or smothering them with help.

So how do you know if you are getting the balance right in supporting your VCE student?

You're getting it right if you can stay calm and discuss issues with them when things are going right or wrong - if you celebrate success when it's happening and work through problems calmly when it is not. You're getting it right if there's a good aura around the house and very little angst or anger.

While maintaining that ideal permanently is a bit utopian, if you're getting some signs of this balance you are probably doing OK. If you can keep the lines of communication open, you're on the right track.

So how do you know if you have an over-stressed teenager? Things like moodiness, short temper, hearing them get up through the night, sleeplessness and sudden reactions to situations when they are usually even-tempered, will give you a clue that all is not well.

It can be hard for parents to know how their VCE kids are travelling, but signs of an under-performing student would be notes in the diary about homework not being done or work not being handed in on time.

Hopefully you will pick up on these difficulties before you get a call from the school, so it's worth checking to see if there are any issues you need to act on.

If you have an under-performing student, you must negotiate some ground rules, such as limiting phone calls and emails to between 5pm and 6pm, and then the rest of the evening should be devoted to study.

If your child refuses to co-operate, you may have to go to the extreme of removing the SIM card from the mobile – a sure way of curtailing phone calls.

But be sure to put in some rewards for increased effort - if your child knuckles down and spends more time studying, acknowledge this by shouting them a DVD hire or new CD occasionally.

If you have the opposite problem with an over-stressed student who is studying too much, get them out of the house by taking them out to dinner, suggesting they go to the footy on the weekend or the movies with friends.

If your VCE child is sleeping excessively and still complaining of tiredness, or at the other extreme, not being able to sleep, these are danger signs. If they are withdrawing from everything and not communicating, it's time to get some outside help before they become suicide risks.

Get a godparent or a close relative to take them out and try to find out how they are really feeling. School counsellors and organisations like Relationships Australia Victoria can also help if you feel you have an at-risk student.

At the end of the VCE year, give yourselves a pat on the back for achieving your very own VCE – you are now a Very Capable Expert when it comes to surviving life as a Year 12 parent.

## Survival tips

- **Step back but offer support when asked**
- **Watch for signs of serious stress and get some help**
- **Encourage an under-performing student with restrictions and rewards**