

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Understanding and perspective help kids turn away from cliques

More than anything, most middle schoolers just want to fit in at school. But what if your child goes from fitting in with her friends one day to being shunned the next? Chances are she's fallen victim to a clique.

Cliques—ever-shifting groups of peers who actively exclude certain kids—are a fact of life during adolescence. Helping your child deal with them will help keep her focused on schoolwork and learning rather than on social drama.

To clique-proof your child:

- **Talk about cliques.** Explain that cliques aren't really about friendships. They are about power. If a person in a group starts teasing or being mean to a peer, she's doing it because it makes her feel powerful.
- **Remind her that being excluded** isn't her fault. Your child may assume that if she were different—thinner, cooler, etc.—she would be accepted in the group. But it is the excluder, not the victim, who's at fault.
- **Help her find options.** Can she focus on friendships after school—on a team or in a club, for example? Can she befriend others in class?
- **Offer perspective.** Share your own experiences with cliques. Remind your child how quickly emotions can change, and reassure her that, in time, clique issues will eventually end.

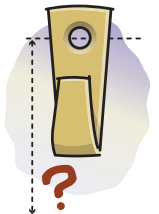
Source: "Helping Kids Cope With Cliques," KidsHealth, niswc.com/clique.



Practice practical math

You don't have to be able to teach math to help your child be successful in it. Just model a positive attitude about math, and give her opportunities to use her math skills.

For example, let your child do any measuring you need at home. Have her find the area of a room or figure out where to hang a picture hook. She'll keep her skills sharp and see how useful math is.



Attendance enables success

It's vital that your child come to school each day on time and ready to learn. If his attendance has started to slip:

- **Talk to his teachers.** If your child has been skipping a class, there could be something going on.
- **Set and enforce consequences.** Tell your child that missing class is not an option. If you learn he has skipped, impose an agreed-upon consequence.
- **Prep the night before.** Have your child put completed homework in his backpack, pack his lunch and choose his clothes for the next day.



Don't stop encouraging perseverance

Perseverance. Grit. Persistence. They all involve sticking with a task or continuing toward a goal when things get tough. Without these traits, your child's chances for success in school will be limited. To develop them:

- **Support your child's efforts.** If he plans to raise his French grade by studying for 30 minutes each night, offer to quiz him on vocabulary words. Encourage him to report his success to you each time he puts in the time. Applaud him for carrying out his plan.
- **Emphasize practice.** Practicing in order to get better at something is a form of perseverance. But the thought of a lot of practice can be overwhelming. So, break it down. This week, your child can do three practice problems a night. When that's routine, he can add more.
- **Eliminate wasted time.** Too much recreational screen time, for example, can hold your child back. Make a deal with him that you will each cut back on one time-waster by 10 minutes a night.

Source: B. Lewis: *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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Add reading to holiday fun

Most students look forward to relaxing and doing their own thing over winter break. But reading for 20 minutes a day will help your child maintain her school momentum. To encourage your child to read this month:

- **Give books,** or bookstore gift cards, as gifts.
- **Tie reading** to her idea of a good time. Does she enjoy gadgets? Have her read an instruction manual and put one together.
- **Link movies to books.** Your child may want to watch movies over break. Encourage her to watch one that's based on a book—but to read the book first.





My child won't do homework without me. What can I do?

Q: My seventh grader expects me to remind him about assignments, gather his supplies for him and tell him when it's time to study. How can I help him take more responsibility for his schoolwork?

A: Middle school is as much about growing up and becoming responsible as it is about academics. So you're right to want your child to rely more on himself and less on you.

To foster responsibility for learning:

- **Talk to your child.** Say, "I'm glad that you want my help with school stuff, but you're leaning on me too much. We are going to shift the responsibility onto you."
- **Create routines** to help your child take responsibility for his assignments. For example, you might say, "Instead of waiting for me to remind you to do your homework, start your homework one hour after you get home from school. It's up to you to get started."
- **Give your child the tools he needs.** Make sure he has a planner and a calendar to record and track his assignments. Stock up on school supplies, too, but let him organize them so he'll know where they are.
- **Stand back.** Your child may forget an assignment or two as he gets used to his new role, but resist the urge to swoop in and help him.



Are you helping your child help others?

Participating in community service is a great way for your child to help others. What's more, kids who volunteer tend to earn better grades in school. Are you encouraging your child to get involved? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your child about the need to help others who are less fortunate?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to volunteer for causes she finds meaningful?
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** ways your child can get involved, such as by volunteering through a youth group?
- ___ **4. Do you support** your child's efforts to serve? For example, do you give her a ride to do volunteer work?

- ___ **5. Do you volunteer** with your child?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are developing your child's community spirit. For each no, try that idea.

"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does."

—William James

Spur thoughtful discussion

Does your middle schooler weigh all sides of an issue before picking a position? Can he give a reasoned opinion when asked? If not, don't worry. Like other skills, thinking skills can be sharpened over time. To help:

- **Engage your child in conversation.** Discuss issues of the day. Urge him to ask questions about things he sees and hears.
- **Ask open-ended questions** that can't be answered with *yes* or *no*. "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- **Avoid interrogation.** Keep your exchanges casual and friendly.

Source: "What is Critical Thinking?" Digest of Gifted Research, Duke Talent Identification Program, niswc.com/critical.

Teach respect by example

To encourage respectful behavior, show your child what it looks like. Here are two ways:

- 1. Listen** to your child's opinions, even if you don't agree with them.
- 2. Take an interest** in your child's life. Ask about what she's learning in school. Find out who her friends are. Show her that what happens to her matters to you.

Prepare your child to use good judgment

Responsible students usually "do the right thing." But knowing what's right takes judgment. To guide your child toward better judgment:



- **Give him increasing responsibility** for routine tasks. Assign regular chores, but let him decide when to do them. If it doesn't go well, ask what he's learned. Help him work out a new plan.
- **Discuss situations in advance.** Role-playing with you will help him make a good decision when it counts.

Source: N.I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do if You Can't*, Workman Publishing.

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