

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



January 2017

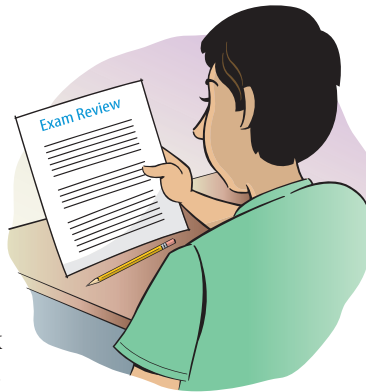
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Educational Service Unit 10

Focus on attendance now to help your child finish the year strong

Every day of middle school is important, from the first to the last. But after the winter break, missing school can have serious academic consequences for your child. Unless he is ill or there is a family emergency, your child needs to be in school. Here's why:

- **The year is half over**, and teachers are focusing on covering the curriculum material in the time remaining. The pace of instruction is picking up. That makes it harder for your child to catch up if he misses classes.
- **Teachers will soon start** reviewing for end-of-year exams. This will go on at the same time as regular teaching.
- **Your child may have** more homework as a result of instruction and exam review. He may also have long-term assignments due that involve work to be done in class. The more time your child is out of school, the more schoolwork piles up. And he will be required to turn it all in.



To ensure that your child has a strong attendance record, continue to:

- **Emphasize** that attendance in every class, every day is important. Being on time is important, too!
- **Accept** no excuses for tardiness, skipping class or missing school.
- **Avoid** making plans for your child that would involve missing school.



Resolved: Get a fresh start in 2017!

While it may come in the middle of the school year, January is a great time for a fresh start. Depending on your child's strengths and weaknesses, encourage her to make New Year's resolutions related to her:

- **Homework habits.** Your child should set aside a specific time for homework and studying each night. Remind her to stay with it.
- **Sleep schedule.** Has sleeping in on weekends made waking up for school a major struggle on Monday mornings? Have your child stick to a reasonable bedtime all week and keep weekend sleeping-in to under two hours.
- **Test prep.** Cramming doesn't work. Your child should plan to hit the books for a short time each night during the week leading up to a test. She may see a payoff in her grades!
- **Organization.** Your child can't turn in assignments she can't find. Suggest that she resolve to clean out her backpack and binders weekly, and keep her study area neat.

Plan where the time goes

Middle school is demanding. That's why time management is a critical skill for students to develop. Help your child:



- **Set priorities.** Each day, have him write down everything he needs to do, then number the tasks in order of importance and complete them in that order. That way, if he runs out of time, he'll have done the things that matter most.
- **Practice saying no.** Using time wisely means sometimes responding with, "Thanks for thinking of me, but I have too much on my plate right now."

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Touchstone.

Tie reading to fun activities

To encourage your child to read more, plan some activities that may excite her to explore a subject in more depth.



For example, you might offer to drive your child and her friends to the ice rink. But first, she must tell you when ice skating became an Olympic sport and who the first five gold medalists were. She'll have to do some reading to find out!

Enrich after-school hours

After-school enrichment programs, at school or in the community, offer students many benefits. In fact, research shows that regular attendance in a quality after-school program can lead to:

- **Better social skills**, including communication and problem-solving.
- **Greater student interest** in school.
- **Better performance in school**, including higher grades and more completion of homework.

Look for a program that interests your child.

Source: "Taking a Deeper Dive into Afterschool: Positive Outcomes and Promising Practices" Afterschool Alliance, niswc.com/afterschool.



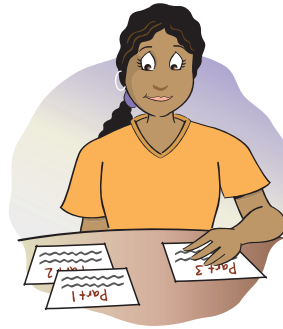
My child's anxiety is affecting her learning. What can I do?

Q: My 13-year-old gets stressed-out about everything from homework to snowstorms! How can I help her manage her anxiety so she can relax and focus on learning?

A: Middle school is full of big changes, so it's not surprising that your child gets worked up sometimes. But if the stress is too much, it's time to take action.

To help your child cope with everyday stress:

- **Teach her to recognize the warning signs.** Does she twirl her hair or bite her nails when she's anxious? Have her pay attention to those early warning signs. Stress is more manageable when it's caught early.
- **Develop an action plan.** If your child is overwhelmed by a large project, help her break it down into smaller, less daunting, parts.
- **Find ways for her to blow off steam.** Exercise, reading or chatting with a friend may help your child calm down.
- **Encourage healthy habits.** A balanced diet and adequate sleep—eight to 10 hours a night for kids ages 13 to 18—can help ease anxiety.
- **Remind her that you have her back.** Your child may feel the weight of the world on her shoulders. Tell her you will help her overcome her stress.
- **Consult her counselor or doctor** for advice if anxiety continues to be a problem for your child.



Suggest responsible actions

One way to encourage your child to take responsibility for her learning and her actions is to talk with her about the traits that responsible people share, and how she can model them. These include:

- **A sense of duty.** For your child, that might mean getting ready for school on time and completing her homework—even when she doesn't feel like it.
- **Self-reliance.** Empower your child to handle as many self-care tasks as she can manage, such as packing her school lunch.
- **Persistence.** She can show persistence by hanging in there when the going gets tough and looking for new solutions.

Source: "Responsibility," Boys Town Parenting, niswc.com/duty.

Make time for 'quick writes'

"Quick writes" are an easy way to help your child practice writing and strengthen family ties. Gather the family and choose a familiar topic. Then:



1. **Set a timer** for three minutes.
2. **Have everyone write** whatever they want to about the topic.
3. **Take turns sharing** what each of you wrote when the timer goes off.

Revive interest in school

Is your child sliding into a midyear slump? To build his enthusiasm for school in the months to come:

- **Talk to your child.** Is something going on at school that's upsetting him? Let him know you are available to listen.
- **Help him get involved.** It's not too late to join a school club. Ask his guidance counselor what might be a good fit.
- **Offer occasional rewards.** A weekend hike or a trip to the bookstore as a reward for hard work may help him bounce back.



Are you preparing for the future?

Middle school students may not be ready to fill out college applications, but they are ready to start thinking about pathways to the future. Are you encouraging your child to plan ahead? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to take challenging courses? _____ habits now, since he'll need them even more in the future?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about careers he might like to pursue? _____
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** different options for higher education (college, technical school, etc.)? _____
- ___ **4. Do you express** your expectation that your child will get the most education possible? _____
- ___ **5. Do you work** with your child to establish good study _____

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you and your child are preparing a foundation for his future. For each no, try that idea.

"Invest in the future; have a child and teach her well."

—Author unknown

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