

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Share strategies to help your child get more out of studying

In middle school, students are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning. That means they need to strengthen their study skills so they can work independently and effectively.

Practice these study strategies with your child and encourage him to use them when he works on his assignments:

- **Answer six questions.** When reading, your teen should keep these questions in mind: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. Answering them will give him a basic understanding of the material. It can also help him create an outline.
- **Learn the vocabulary.** Your child will struggle with an assignment if he doesn't understand the terminology. Encourage him to use a dictionary.
- **Evaluate information.** Many assignments require your child to understand the difference between significant ideas and details. Practice this with your child: "Jim's tears fell on his blue shirt as he walked up to the house." Which is more important, the fact that Jim had a blue shirt on or that he was crying?
- **Compare and contrast.** Your child should think about how things are alike and how they are different. Practicing this skill will help with several subjects. Help him by asking questions like, "How are a cat and a tiger alike? How are they different?"



Source: D. Johnson and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, Kaplan Publishing.



Support your child's success on tests

When your middle schooler takes a test, your reassuring attitude and the way you support her at home can help her do her best. Before your child's next test, make an effort to:

- **Stay calm.** Your child may be anxious about taking a test. Your anxiety could make it worse.
 - **Be positive.** Your child will benefit from hearing things such as, "You studied hard and you are prepared."
 - **Know what's expected.** Stay in contact with the teachers to learn things like how far in advance tests are announced, the format of the tests and whether the teachers provide study guides.
 - **Promote attendance.** Your child can't do well on tests if she doesn't go to school regularly.
- After a test, remember: If your child generally does well, there is no need to panic about one poor test result. Just say, "I'm confident you'll do better next time. Let me know if you want me to help you review."

Encourage real-life writing

To help your child improve her writing skills, give her useful and fun ways to practice. Here are two:



1. Write a holiday letter.

Ask your child to recap the year for your family's end-of-year letter. Offer suggestions, then let her decide what to write.

2. Start a family blog.

Encourage your child to set it up and update family and friends about your activities.

Consider the sources

Finding sources of information is a key part of any research project. Share these tips to help your child do research:

- **Look for up-to-date,** reliable sources.
- **Evaluate internet sources** carefully. Are their creators advocating for a certain cause or perspective? Sites ending in *.gov* or *.edu* are generally reputable choices.
- **Go to the library.** Not all helpful books and articles are available online.
- **Document everything.** Note the sources of all information.

Source: R. Fry, *How to Study*, Cengage Learning.

Point toward a bright future

Studies show that one way to boost academic achievement is to help your child see that doing well in school is about more than getting good grades—it's about being able to reach goals for the future, such as college and a career.



Middle school students are too young to have their life paths set in stone. But they are at a great age to begin thinking about the future and planning ways to get there. And though it may not always seem like it, they take their parents' guidance seriously.

Source: N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson, "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association.



How can I revive my child's desire to succeed in school?

Q: My daughter was excited about starting a new school year. She planned to study and work hard. But she's already slacking off. How can I keep her motivated to do well?

A: It's impossible to force middle schoolers to care about school. The more you try to control your daughter, the less motivated she's likely to become. So, try using a positive approach:

- **Believe in your child!** Talk to her about her special talents and what she might be able to do in the future.
- **Help her set specific learning goals.** Make sure some of them are achievable in the short-term. The great feeling that comes from reaching a goal can inspire her to reach for the next one.
- **Praise effort.** Notice when and how long she works on an assignment.
- **Ask your child to share what she knows.** What can she tell you about the book she is reading? Can she show you a different way to solve a math problem?
- **Support extracurricular activities.** Kids who see themselves as successful in one area may feel motivated to succeed in the classroom.



You may also need to solve specific problems. Is your child afraid of looking foolish in front of the class? Let her practice in front of you. Is she tuning out because the work is too hard or too easy? Does she need a tutor? Reach out to her teachers for their perspective.



Do you take a stand against cheating?

Surveys have found that a majority of middle school students admit to having cheated in school. Are you addressing the issue of cheating with your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you set an example** by being honest yourself?
2. **Have you reviewed** the school honor code with your child? Talk about why it's important to follow it.
3. **Do you discuss** types of cheating—copying, getting exam questions early, texting answers, etc.—and reinforce that they are *all* wrong?
4. **Do you make it clear** to your child that copying passages from the internet and saying it's his own work is cheating?
5. **Do you talk** with your child about the consequences of cheating?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean that you are teaching your child not to cheat. For each no, try that idea.

"All children need to grow up believing that what they are heading for is reachable and worth seeking. Then it will be."

—Mel Levine

R ratings and alcohol risk

Research has shown that middle schoolers whose parents let them watch R-rated movies are more likely to try alcohol than those who aren't allowed to watch them. To limit your child's risk:

- **Know the content** of any movie your child is going to watch.
- **Consider whether alcohol use** is depicted when deciding whether or not to let your child watch an R-rated movie.
- **Talk to parents** of your child's friends about your views on these movies.

Source: S.E. Tanski, M.D. and others, "Parental R-Rated Movie Restriction and Early-Onset Alcohol Use," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

Routines feed responsibility

Don't abandon routines just because your child is now in middle school. Routines are valuable tools for fostering responsibility and getting things done. If



your child knows exactly when he's expected to study, feed the dog and get ready for bed, he's more likely to do all those things.

Expect emotional thinking

It doesn't matter how grown-up your child acts—it will be years before she can think like an adult. Her brain is not yet wired to stop and think, "I'd better cool it, because I might get in trouble." Emotional thinking usually wins out over rational thinking at this age. To help prevent problems:

- **Have your child practice** instant responses, such as asking for a break and walking away, or counting to 10.
- **Set firm rules** and stick to them.
- **Don't take her angry comments** personally.

Source: K.R. Ginsburg, M.D. with M.M. Jablow, "But I'm Almost 13!" *An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, Contemporary Books.

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