

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

Prepare your child for a successful journey through middle school

The start of a new school year is an exciting time. It's an opportunity for students to set off on new learning journeys. Your child will need more than supplies to reach his destination. Here are six things you can do to help him on the road:



- 1. Be positive.** Expect your child to do well, even if last year was challenging. Help him set realistic goals for this school year. Discuss how he plans to reach them, and show confidence that he will.
- 2. Establish ground rules.** Help your child get back into positive school habits, such as studying every day. Limit the amount of time he spends watching TV, playing electronic games and browsing social media.
- 3. Let your child do more for himself.** He might make his lunches or do his own laundry. When he has problems, offer guidance, but don't jump in immediately with solutions.
- 4. Ask about school.** Spend a few minutes each day discussing schoolwork and what your child is learning. He'll learn you value education.
- 5. Make time for your child.** Schedule at least one afternoon or evening of one-on-one time each week. Choose something you both like to do and have some fun. You'll strengthen your bond and keep the doors of communication open.
- 6. Get involved.** Introduce yourself to your child's teachers in person or through email. Ask how you can help your child succeed.



Increase responsibility for learning

In middle school, students are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers want students to participate actively in classroom activities. Make sure your child knows it's her responsibility to:

- **Attend all classes.** She can't participate if she's not there.
 - **Arrive on time.** Lateness disrupts the class.
 - **Come prepared,** with homework done and supplies in hand.
 - **Contribute** to class discussions.
 - **Ask questions.** She should try to ask at least one thoughtful question each day.
- Remind her that it is also her responsibility to *avoid*:
- **Talking excessively** when not called upon by the teacher.
 - **Putting her head down** or sleeping in class.
 - **Fidgeting or playing** with games or gadgets.
 - **Completing homework** for one class during another.

Connect learning to life

With a little creativity, you can help your child see the real-life importance of what he's learning in school.

If he's working on fractions in math, for example, invite him into the kitchen. You might say, "This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we have only a 1/3-cup measurer. How can we figure out the right amount?"

Stress effective study skills

Strong study skills will help your child do better in school today and serve her well in high school and beyond. To help her develop study skills:



- **Teach your child to estimate** how much time assignments will take. She'll be better able to plan her study time.
- **Encourage your child** to break large projects down into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Help your child stay organized.** Have her create a system that will help her keep track of assignments. She could color-code her folders and binder sections.

Sleep builds brainpower

Experts agree: Many kids aren't getting enough sleep. That leads to trouble recalling material and concentrating in school. To help your child get the sleep he needs to do his best:



- **Set a bedtime** that results in at least nine hours of sleep. Be consistent throughout the week.
- **Establish a bedtime routine** that gives your child time to unwind.
- **Enforce a screen time curfew.** Using electronics right before bed delays sleep.

Source: J. Dewald and others, "The influence of sleep quality, sleep duration and sleepiness on school performance in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review," *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, Elsevier.



How do I help my child make friends in middle school?

Q: My daughter is starting middle school. She's worried about making friends. That hasn't been easy for her in the past. I'm afraid it will be even harder in a larger school. What can I do to help?

A: It can actually be easier for children to make friends in a large middle school. There are more students and more diversity. This will give your daughter a greater chance to find others who share her interests.

Remind your child that other kids will be worried about making friends, too. Then encourage her to try some things that can make friendships come more easily:

- **Practice starting conversations.** Help her brainstorm opening lines. "I really like your ..." or "What is your favorite subject?"
- **Read books and magazines,** and keep current on movies, sports and school events. This will give her things to talk about.
- **Join an after-school club** or sports team.
- **Make the first move.** She could invite two students from one of her classes to go to a movie or do homework with her.

Your daughter needs to take the lead. But you can support her by being nonjudgmental—of her and her friends. Keep snacks and games on hand, and encourage your child to invite classmates over.



Take part in school life

Being involved in your child's education doesn't have to take a lot of time. And even a little involvement can make a difference. Make an effort to:

- **Keep in touch with teachers.** Let them know if you have questions or concerns about your child's learning.
- **Attend school events,** especially those involving your child.
- **Join a parent-teacher group,** such as a PTA, PTO or school leadership team.

Prepare for peer pressure

Peer pressure can have both positive and negative effects on middle schoolers. But good or bad, all peer pressure requires kids to make a decision: "Should I



do what others want me to?" To prepare your child to handle peer pressure:

- **Discuss it.** Kids want to be liked. But there are more important things than popularity. Ask, "Do real friends push you to do things you believe are wrong?"
- **Role-play situations.** Discuss ways to handle peer pressure, such as standing up for oneself or using humor to defuse a tense situation.
- **Praise his good decisions.** Make sure he knows you support him.

Let actions teach lessons

Your child forgot her homework and asks you to bring it to school. Or she didn't finish her paper and asks you to email the teacher with an excuse. Do you do it?

Solving your child's problems for her today can create even bigger problems in the future. Instead, encourage her to think about the results of an action before she takes it. If she doesn't turn in her work, she'll have to face the consequences. Let her learn from experience.

Parent Quiz

Are you promoting pleasure reading?

Reading for pleasure helps students build comprehension and vocabulary skills. Are you encouraging your middle schooler to make time to read for fun? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you provide** a variety of reading material (books, magazines, newspapers) in your home?
- ___ **2. Do you schedule** regular trips to the library so your child can check out books?
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** books on topics that interest your child?
- ___ **4. Do you set** a good example by reading and talking with your child about the things you read?
- ___ **5. Do you have** a regular time each week for family reading?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are encouraging your child to have good reading habits. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."

—Jane D. Hull

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