

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



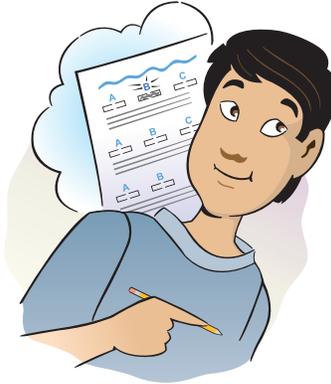
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Multiple strategies lead to multiple-choice test success

Most students take standardized tests—and middle schoolers are no exception. The tests can have a big effect on your child's future education, so the next time a multiple-choice exam looms, don't just hand him a No. 2 pencil and a four-leaf clover. Instead, prepare him to do better by teaching him effective test-taking strategies, including:

- **Reading the whole question.** If he's being timed, your child may tend to race through the test. Slowing down to read the whole question will help him avoid misunderstanding what is being asked.
- **Picking out key words.** Your child should look for words such as *except*, *compare* and *including*. They often go to the heart of the question.
- **Considering each available answer.** Even if he feels certain that the first answer he sees is correct, your child should read through the rest, anyway. It's possible that another answer is stronger.
- **Answering the easiest questions first.** Once he gets past those, he can use the remaining minutes to revisit the tricky ones.
- **Making an informed guess.** If your child truly has no clue about an answer, he should guess (assuming there's no penalty for doing so). He should first eliminate any answers that are obviously wrong, then choose from the remaining options.



Source: G.E. Tompkins, "Preparing for Standardized Tests," Education.com, <http://www.tinyurl.com/lr9kmtc>.



Pull the plug on cyberbullying

Research shows that one in five students is affected by cyberbullying—the harrasing, threatening or insulting of peers online or via cell phone.

Here are some suggestions from the Cyberbullying Research Center to help stamp it out:

- **Ask your child** for her ideas to stop cyberbullying. Be sure she knows she can talk to you about it.
- **Monitor cell phone use.** If your child has a phone, set limits on its use, and tell your child you retain the right to review its contents at any time. Look over the bill each month.
- **Obey social networking rules.** For example, Facebook's policy is that users must be 13 or older.
- **Remind your child** when she goes online or texts to ask herself: Could this message be hurtful? Could it get me in trouble? Could it get the receiver in trouble? If the answer is *yes* to any of these, she shouldn't post or send the message.

Source: "Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention and Response," Cyberbullying Research Center, <http://tinyurl.com/47tmxrb>.

Don't lose respect—build it

In middle school, negative peer pressure can make children "forget" to be respectful. But respect is important to school success. You'll help your child "remember" if you solve problems together, emphasize empathy (How do you think Grandma felt when you didn't say hi?) and restrict access to offensive media. Enforce consequences (respectful ones, of course!) for disrespect.

Celebrate Earth Day online

Earth Day is April 22! Your child can learn more about the world's ecology and her place in it on these websites:



- **The World Wildlife Fund footprint calculator** (ecoguru.panda.org). Answer a few questions and see how our choices affect the environment.
- **Beyond the Barrel** (tinyurl.com/3uhqhc). What happens to trash and recycling after it hits the curb?
- **Biomes of the World** (tinyurl.com/3zuro3m). Discover how ecosystems depend on one another.

Source: "Earth Day: TeachersFirst Editors' Choices," TeachersFirst, <http://tinyurl.com/c362j5>.

Schedule some downtime

Extracurricular activities are supposed to be enriching and entertaining. But your child won't be able to succeed *in* school if he is overcommitted *outside* of it. Ask yourself:

- **Is he frequently tired** or irritated? Experts say middle schoolers need nine to 10 hours of sleep a night.
- **Does he struggle to** finish his homework? He may have too many competing demands on his time.
- **Do "mystery illnesses" keep him** from participating? The activity may be adding stress, not fun, to his life.





Teen talk—how much is enough?

Q: My child used to chat with me all the time. But now that she's 13, she's much more likely to go to her friends. She's a great kid and does fine in school, but should I be worried that we're not communicating like we once did?

A: Probably not. As kids reach the teenage years, it's normal for their interactions with parents to change.



You still need to be aware of what is going on in school, and let your child know you will always listen to her. But keep in mind that typical teenage communication is often:

- **Hurried.** Kids this age rarely crave long heart-to-hearts with Mom or Dad. Instead, teens are likely to be rushed and may even cut you off. They're not trying to be rude—they're being developmentally appropriate!
- **Spontaneous.** Your teen may go days speaking to you in monosyllables. Then suddenly she'll share half a dozen things that happened in math class. Communication at this age is usually feast or famine. Be sure to pay attention when she does open up.
- **Focused elsewhere.** It can feel jarring (and a little sad), but it's completely natural for teens to prefer talking to their friends over their parents. It's part of growing up.

Remember, if there's something serious happening in your child's life, she's still apt to tell you about it. But her day-to-day ups and downs? Most of those will be shared with friends.



Are you raising a young adult?

If you have a middle schooler, you are entering into a different stage of parenting—steering your child toward the independence he needs, in school now and into adulthood. Are you ready?

Answer *yes* for things you do often, *no* for things you do rarely or never.

- ___ **1. Do you allow** your child to do as much as appropriately possible for himself: homework, chores, making decisions?
- ___ **2. Do you let** your child make the mistakes he needs to in order to learn?
- ___ **3. Do you keep** emotions under control when dealing with your child, so he can begin to separate from you?
- ___ **4. Do you work** with your child to set boundaries,

and offer more freedom in exchange for increased responsibility?

How well are you doing?

Yes *answers mean you are comfortable with your changing parental role. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

“As your kids grow, they may forget what you said, but won't forget how you made them feel.”

—Kevin Heath

Good questions prompt good choices



Many children want to make choices that will help them in school, but don't know how to think them through. These tips will help:

- **Consider the consequences.** Have your child ask: “What could happen next?” and “Will I be happy with that outcome?”
- **Character counts.** Especially hers. “Does this decision fit the person I am?”
- **Look at the big picture.** “Does it fit the person I want to become?”
- **Think of others.** “Will this decision cause anyone harm?”

Source: Iowa Public Television, “Making Good Choices: Keys to Good Decisions,” <http://tinyurl.com/patol65>.

Raise a tech-savvy teen

If your child is usually welded to his phone, computer or tablet, you may worry that his brain will melt. There is some good news. Research says students who use technology *appropriately* in and out of class are likely to:

- **Strengthen problem-solving skills.**
- **Do well on school assessments.**
- **Feel motivated to learn.**

Source: H.A. Napier, Ph.D. and P.J. Judd, “Teaching Technology: Building Essential Skills for Middle School Students,” *The Balance Sheet*, <http://tinyurl.com/p7v28a5>.

Check it out—a middle school guide to the Internet

Many middle schoolers go online to do homework. It can be hard for parents to know which sites are appropriate for 12- to 14-year olds. Try the Virtual Middle School Library (www.sldirectory.com/virtual.html). It features:

- **Links to educational sites** on all subjects, from writing papers to science fairs.
- **“The Reading Room,”** which suggests websites for finding books on any topic.
- **Resources for parents** and teachers.

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