

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Social studies class looks at the world and your child's place in it

Middle schoolers learn important lessons in social studies—including an understanding of history, culture and what it means to be an active citizen—that help prepare them to be productive adults.



To boost your child's success in social studies:

- **Find out what he's studying.** Ask the teacher what will be covered in class in the coming weeks. See if she has suggestions for how to reinforce what your child is learning. Ask your local librarian for ideas, too.
- **Bring it to life.** Whenever possible, expose your child to "social studies in action." Take him to a museum or art gallery. Attend a community cultural event. Visit nearby attractions you've always meant to check out, but haven't yet. Make your child feel a part of his hometown—and of society at large.
- **Talk about current events.** There's a lot going on in the world today. Read the newspaper together or follow the news online. Help your child realize that world events aren't just things that happen "somewhere" to "someone." They have a real impact on people's lives—including his.
- **Monitor his sources.** It's fine to allow your child to explore social studies topics or games online. But make sure the sites he visits are up to date, high quality and reputable.

Source: "Middle School Social Studies: Resources for Students, Teachers and Parents," Finding Dulcinea, [niswc.com/socialstudies](http://niswc.com/socialstudies).



## Practice + process = improved writing

If your child struggles with writing, the good news is that following a few simple steps (and lots of practice) will help. Share these tips with your child:

1. **Write what you're thinking.** Instead of agonizing over each word, your child should pretend she is simply talking to someone.
2. **Read what you write.** She can read aloud to someone, or if she's too shy, to herself. What can she change to make it sound better?
3. **Look for help online.** Many websites provide useful writing tips. Ask your child's teacher for some suggestions.
4. **Make changes.** Your child will probably need to go through two or three drafts before a paper is in final form. Editing and revising can be a challenging stage of the process for a student, so provide extra encouragement!
5. **Remember** that one of the best ways to improve writing is done without paper or pencil. Read!

Source: R. Kavanagh, "Help Middle School Students Improve Writing Skills," Eduguide, [niswc.com/pandp](http://niswc.com/pandp).

## Promote cyber civility

When your child communicates online, make sure he keeps these questions in mind:

- **Would I say it to someone's face?**
- **Would it be bullying if done in person?**
- **Would I be uncomfortable if my teacher saw it?**

If any answer is *yes*, he shouldn't post it!

## Order up some math help

Math problems are simpler to solve if you know the order of operations. Teach your child to:



1. **Think PEMDAS.** PEMDAS is the order in which to do operations. *P* stands for equations in parentheses. *E*: exponents. *M*: multiplication. *D*: division. *A*: addition. *S*: subtraction.
2. **Rewrite the problem,** replacing equations in parentheses with their solutions, and then replacing exponents with number equivalents, for example 9 for  $3^2$ .
3. **Do the multiplication** and division from left to right, and then do the addition and subtraction the same way.

Source: "Determining Order of Operations," HelpingWithMath.com, [niswc.com/pemdas](http://niswc.com/pemdas).

## Take tech to the next level

Most middle schoolers are very savvy when it comes to the computer. So help your child build other skills that will enhance her technological efforts, including:



- **Judgment.** Does your child know what makes a website a good source? Discuss it with her.
- **Creativity.** Is there an unexpected way your child can present the information she finds? Audio? Video? Encourage her to use all the tools at her disposal.

Source: M. Stansbury, "Five technology skills every student should learn," eSchool News, [niswc.com/techskills](http://niswc.com/techskills).



## How do I teach my child to make the right choices?

**Q:** I know I'm deciding too many things for my child. How can I help her start making her own choices without letting her make poor ones?

**A:** You can't. Learning to make good decisions—and learning lessons from the bad ones—is part of growing up. So when your child makes a poor choice, don't see it as "letting her fail." Instead, view it as allowing her to figure out what good decision-making is.

Of course, there are certain areas where your child should not be able to decide things for herself. These include:

- **Drug and alcohol use.**
- **Chores.**
- **School attendance.**

Other areas should be open for discussion—at least to a degree. For example:

- **Bedtime.** Let your child weigh in on when she thinks she ought to go to bed. If it's reasonable, allow it (as long as she doesn't start dozing off in class).
- **Her room.** Assuming it's not so horrible that the health department intervenes, let your child decide how spic-and-span things should be.
- **Studying.** Your child must do her homework. But be flexible about *how* she does it. If she claims she works best lying on the floor with music blaring, let her try it. Her grades will reveal whether she's correct.



## Is your child's attention wandering?

Just as middle schoolers head into the last quarter of the school year, spring arrives with all sorts of distractions. Are you helping your child concentrate his efforts on schoolwork? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you encourage** your child to engage in a focus-building activity he enjoys, such as reading or sports?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to finish tasks and praise him for doing so?

\_\_\_ **3. Do you discourage** multi-tasking? It is difficult to concentrate on homework while texting friends.

\_\_\_ **4. Do you make an effort** not to interrupt or distract your child when he is focused and working hard?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you limit** your child's screen time?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child maintain concentration. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"Our patience will achieve more than our force."  
—Edmund Burke*

## The college path starts here

Did you know there are things your middle schooler can do now to prepare for college? Encourage your child to:

- **Challenge herself.** She should take honors courses if she's eligible. A higher-level math class now will put her on the path to advanced math in high school.
- **Read.** Strong reading skills are vital to achieving academically.
- **Think about** what she wants to do. Talk to her about how she might turn her interests into a career someday. The more excited she gets now, the more motivated she may become to succeed in school.

Source: "Middle & High School Students: Get Ready," KnowHow2GO, [niswc.com/collegeprep](http://niswc.com/collegeprep).

## Cultivate positive traits

Your child's character determines his behavior—at school and elsewhere. Teach him that:



- **It's hard to go wrong** being nice.
- **People remember** the words you use. Insulting language lowers opinions of you.
- **Judging others** by their skin color, background, beliefs, or friendships reflects badly on you.

## Disarm your testy child

Talking with an adolescent can feel like navigating a mine field. To keep communicating with a minimum of explosions:

- **Keep questions brief** and open-ended. "What are you doing in science this week?"
- **Be available.** If your child rarely talks, it's crucial to listen when she does.
- **Never talk down to your child.** Her problems may seem minor to you, but they seem major to her.
- **Never give up.** Keep being the reliable presence your child depends on.

### Helping Students Learn®

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