

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



December 2010

Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

Mistakes & neglect are different

Don't expect your preteen to learn responsibility overnight. But do expect her to take her responsibilities seriously. Be clear about your expectations of her contribution to making the household run smoothly. Teach her that there is a difference between a mistake and neglect.

A *mistake* might be accidentally adding too much detergent to the laundry. The result might be a sudsy puddle on the floor.

Everyone slips up sometimes. Don't expect perfection from your child. Instead:

- **Share** a laugh over her soapy misstep.
- **Help** her clean up the mess.
- **Show** her how to do the job correctly next time.



Neglect is ignoring dirty clothes on the bedroom floor. The result might be a frantic search for a clean soccer shirt as the school bus is about to arrive.

Don't ignore your child's neglect. Instead:

- **Talk to her** about where she fell short and why. (She missed having her clothes washed on laundry day.)
- **Remind her** that she's an important member of the family. Her contributions matter. (You may not have time to do a special load of laundry just for her.)
- **Enforce a consequence**, such as having her sort, fold and put away all the laundry for the next two weeks.

Source: Kate Thomsen, M.S., C.A.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose*, ISBN: 1-57482-199-7, Search Institute Press.



Adolescent arguments can be avoided

What's the only way to win an argument with your middle schooler? By not having one in the first place. To avoid arguing with your child:

- **Say** what you need to say. *Once*. Avoid lectures or rehashing something you've already said.
- **Don't let** yourself be drawn into an argument. Ignore any ridiculous claims.
- **Be clear** that you will not tolerate rudeness, but do let him conclude the conversation when possible.
- **Schedule** your conversations wisely. If a certain issue is likely to

lead to arguing, tackle it during a low-stress time for both of you.

If, despite your best efforts to solve the problem calmly, your middle schooler continues to argue, it's best to simply walk away.

Remember, arguing doesn't solve problems—it creates them.

Source: Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D., *Surviving Your Adolescents*, ISBN: 1-889140-08-2, Child Management, Inc.

Integrity is important

Nearly every child has an episode of some kind of dishonesty. This holiday season, instill a sense of integrity in your child by:

- **Modeling** the behavior you want.
- **Being clear** that lying is unacceptable.
- **Never branding** your child as a "liar."

Source: Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens*, ISBN: 0-7382-1019-6, Lifelong Books.

Don't interrupt your child

"We never seem to have a conversation."

Sound familiar? However, many parents suffer from the same problem they complain about in their children—they don't listen.

So, make sure you don't take over the conversation. Let your child finish his thoughts before you react.



Source: Kenneth R. Ginsburg with Martha M. Jablo, "But I'm Almost 13!" *An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, ISBN: 0-8092-9717-5, Contemporary Books.

Make attendance a priority

December is a great time to review your child's school attendance:

- **Did your child attend** school every day unless she was sick or there was a true family emergency? Congratulations! Strong attendance is one predictor of school success.



- **If not**, consider whether appointments can take place outside school hours. Can you save travel plans for when school is not in session? Set consequences to deter your child from skipping school.



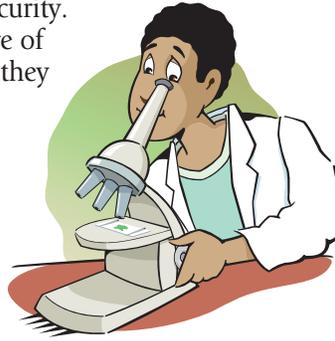
How can parents help build students' self-esteem?

Q: My eighth grader complains that he can't do anything right. How can I help him see that he's a smart, capable person?

A: Adolescence is a time of self-doubt and insecurity. Preteens are just starting to discover the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Here's how you can help him see just how smart and competent he is:

- **Support his interests.** Let your child experience success by putting him where he's most likely to succeed. If sports are his thing, sign him up for baseball or tennis. If he enjoys science, take him to the library and look for books of experiments to try together.
- **Give him responsibilities.** He may gripe about having to clean the garage or empty the dishwasher, but make him do it anyway. Chores are a great way to make your child feel needed because doing them helps the whole family. They may make him more responsible, too.
- **Celebrate his accomplishments.** Did your child just do something wonderful? Congratulate him! Show him that you noticed his achievement, whether it was getting a good grade on a quiz or cooking the family a delicious dinner.



How to motivate your child—and how not to!

Is your middle schooler living up to her potential? If not, here's how to motivate her to do better. You should:

- **Help** her set goals she can reach.
- **Encourage** her to explore her interests.
- **Get help** for her if she struggles at school.
- **Avoid punishing** her for failures.
- **Avoid comparing** her to others.
- **Avoid setting** unreachable expectations.
- **Remember** to love her unconditionally.

Source: "Tips for Parenting Underachievers for Parents of Underachieving Teens," About-Underachieving-Teens.com, www.about-underachieving-teens.com/parenting-tips.html.

Avoid parent peer pressure

Peer pressure is not just for students. To avoid giving in to parent peer pressure:

- **Listen to your instincts**, not to what "other parents" do.
- **Call other parents.** You'll probably confirm your instincts.
- **Be firm.** There are few better models than a parent who adheres to principles.

Source: David Walsh, *Why Do They Act That Way?* ISBN: 0-7432-9071-6, Free Press.



Do you stress the importance of effort?

It's unreasonable to expect every student to get 100% on every assignment. But every student is capable of achieving her own "personal best"—if she makes the effort. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging your child's very best effort:

- ___ **1. Do you notice** your child's effort? Example: "I can see how hard you're working."
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to take pride in her effort? "You must feel great to know that you hung in there."
- ___ **3. Do you model** good effort? "I'm behind on finishing this report but I will have the next section done by tomorrow morning."
- ___ **4. Do you point** to effort as the reason for your child's improvement? "That extra half hour a night of studying has paid off!"

- ___ **5. Do you concentrate** more on your child's effort than the results?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are encouraging your child to strive for her best. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"All the so-called 'secrets of success' in the world won't work unless you do."

—Author Unknown

Note-taking leads to success

Your middle schooler needs good notes to be able to study effectively. To help him master note-taking, teach him to:

- **Be an active listener.** He needs to pay close attention to what the teacher is saying.
- **Focus on key points.** He shouldn't try to write down *every* word.
- **Ask questions.** If he doesn't understand a topic, his notes on it won't make sense.



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