

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

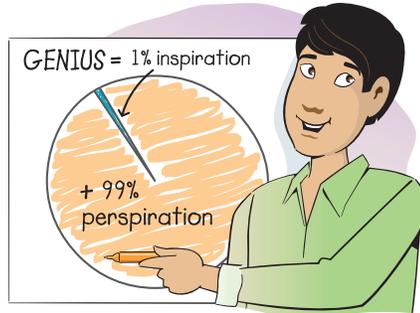


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A positive attitude can inspire your child to work toward success

As Thomas Edison is often credited with saying, "Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." What will motivate your child to do that hard work to achieve his goals? A positive attitude. A positive attitude about school can keep your child studying, problem-solving and learning long after he might otherwise want to give up. It can keep him going until he succeeds.



To encourage your child to have a positive attitude:

- **Have a positive attitude yourself.** If you are negative or pessimistic it is not reasonable or even fair to ask your child to be positive.
- **Help him focus on the things he can change.** A negative attitude often results from feeling helpless. For example, your child probably can't change the material in his classes. If that were his goal, he would feel helpless and negative. But he can change how much he prepares. That can lead to success and a positive feeling of empowerment.
- **Encourage him to think of others.** It is amazing how doing something good for another person can lift you out of a bad mood. Challenge your child to bring a smile to someone's face. A person who does that often is usually a positive person.

Source: "Positive Attitude: Reflections for Middle School Parents. Helping Families Teach Good Character," Orange County (Florida) Public Schools, niswc.com/positivity.



A written plan makes discipline clear

Some middle schoolers don't need much discipline: A talk about values and a few basic rules will do. But others resist rules and enjoy arguing. If your child is among them, try a written discipline plan. Here are some guidelines:

- **Keep it simple.** Choose your "top five" issues and post the rules and consequences for those.
- **Involve your child.** A child who needs a written discipline plan is also a child who does not like to give up control. Give her some input about rules and consequences. But you get the final say.
- **Monitor her progress.** Kids mature over time. When your child

is able to stay within boundaries consistently, you may be able to update the plan. Decide on the next steps together.

A written discipline plan takes away your child's ability to argue. Just point to the plan and show her what you agreed to. Seeing the rules posted will help her remember them.

Source: "Curb Your Teen's Bad Behavior with Discipline that Works," WebMD, niswc.com/written-plan.

Is it bullying? How to tell

It isn't always easy for middle schoolers to recognize bullying, particularly when the bully is popular.

Explain to your child that he should focus on the actions. Are they hurtful? Are words meant to cause sadness, fear or shame? Then it's bullying even if the person doing it is someone everyone likes.

Get your child reading again

If reading has slipped on your child's list of priorities, remind her of some of the many reasons why it's worth her time:

- **Reading makes her an expert.** It is the best way for her to learn as much as possible about her areas of interest.
- **Reading takes her places.** And she can learn things that can help her get there in person someday.
- **Reading can make her laugh.**
- **Reading introduces her to people like her.** Your child may find that characters her age face the same issues she faces.



Source: "Teenagers and Reading," RIF, niswc.com/reasons.

Traditions build connection

He may not admit it, but your child likely gets a sense of security and connection from participating in family traditions. That's good. Students who feel connected to their parents tend to do better academically.

Your child may question some traditions, but urge him to take part. You can also try starting new ones, such as:

- **Writing and sharing** poems about each other.
- **Making a family album** for the year.
- **Volunteering** as a family.





What should I do when my child has to miss school?

Q: We will be traveling over the holidays, and my seventh grader will miss a week of school. How can I keep her from falling behind?

A: First, take a look at your itinerary. Can you alter your plans so your trip falls within the school's break? Making plans around the school schedule is the only way to make sure your child doesn't miss out on learning.

If your travel dates are written in stone, though, to help her stay on top of things:

- **Talk to her teachers.** Well in advance, explain the situation to each of them. See if your child can get started now on planned assignments and readings. If the teachers maintain updated classroom blogs, see if your child can follow each day's lesson from afar. Keep in mind that teachers are under no obligation to adjust to your vacation schedule.
- **Focus on learning while you're away.** Explore museums and cultural/historical attractions and discuss them as a family. Immerse your child in educational activities she might not get at home.
- **Set aside time for reading.** Even if your child doesn't have school assignments to complete while she's away, insist she read for pleasure. A vacation from school should not be a vacation from learning!



Set goals for a bright future

You will help your child more if, rather than emphasizing grades, you focus on preparing her for the future. To encourage her success:

- **Help her set goals.** You're not the only one who should have high expectations for your child. She should, too!
- **Broaden her horizons.** Expose your child to different learning opportunities.
- **Support positive risk-taking.** Praise your child when she tries a new class or a new sport. If she embraces the unknown now, she may be more confident later.

Source: E. Medhus, M.D., *Raising Everyday Heroes: Parenting Children to Be Self-Reliant*, Beyond Words Publishing.

Line up some study buddies

Even great students need help sometimes. Make sure your child has the phone number of a friend in each class—his study buddy. They can agree to call each other when either one:

- **Gets confused** and needs more explanation about an assignment.
- **Is absent** or forgets to write down an assignment.



Responsibility takes practice

Living up to commitments isn't always easy, and it may take your child a long time to learn to do it. Be patient. To help:

- **Don't nag.** Saying "You agreed to do math after dinner," is better than "Why can't you ever do what you say you will?"
- **Think like your child.** She has things other than her chores on her mind. It doesn't mean she is willfully defying you.
- **Use positive consequences.** "After you clean up your room, I will take you to the mall."

Source: K. Greder and M. Schnurr, "Teaching Responsibility to Young Teens," Iowa State University, niscw.com/no-nag.



Are you raising a well-adjusted child?

Middle school students can be self-absorbed. But parents shouldn't let kids get too wrapped up in themselves—especially at gift-giving times of year. Students who respect the needs of others function better in the classroom. Are you helping your child develop a sense of balance? Answer *yes* or *no*:

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| <p>___ 1. Do you give your child a lot of love, but make sure he is not the center of attention all the time?</p> <p>___ 2. Do you listen to your child's concerns, without tolerating a lot of whining?</p> <p>___ 3. Do you make firm, fair and consistent decisions for your child, and avoid giving in if he demands that you change your mind?</p> <p>___ 4. Do you recognize that your child doesn't need the "latest" of everything?</p> | <p>___ 5. Do you require your child to do household chores?</p> <p>How well are you doing?</p> <p><i>More yes answers mean you are working to raise a well-adjusted child. For each no, try that idea.</i></p> |
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"Adolescence does not only happen to the adolescent, it happens to the entire family."

—Brad E. Sachs, Ph.D.

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