

# 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

## Rekindle your child's motivation with praise and ideas for action

By December, many middle schoolers feel as though the school year has been going on forever. Their September enthusiasm has faded like the sun on a winter afternoon.

If your child is dragging a bit, keep her motivated and set her up for a successful spring with these ideas:

- **Supply plenty of praise** and encouragement. Look at your child as she is bent over her textbook and say, "I see how hard you're working and I know it will pay off." Remind her that she has mastered challenging things in the past.
- **Stay involved in her learning.** Back-to-school night and first-quarter teacher conferences may be behind you, but your ongoing involvement will still benefit your child. Attend a game or other school event together. Call or email your child's teachers to check in and ask how your child is doing. And ask your child about what she is learning every day.
- **Offer specific suggestions** to make her schoolwork efforts more effective. For example, if she needs to improve reading comprehension, have her take notes as she reads. Underlining key concepts in her notes can reinforce the material in her mind. Is she struggling with vocabulary words? Encourage her to make flash cards and offer to quiz her on them.



## Get to know the counselor

The guidance counselor is a key person on your child's educational team. Middle school guidance counselors can help students with:

- **Academics and study skills** such as organization.
- **Solving problems** with classmates. This can include mediation.
- **Planning** for high school and beyond.
- **Finding support** if they, or their families, are facing a crisis.

Source: "Why Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association, [niswc.com/mscounsel](http://niswc.com/mscounsel).

## This vacation, try estimation

Estimating is often the first step to finding a precise mathematical answer. Have your child use his estimation skills over winter break on these challenges:

- **How many people** are sitting in the first three rows of the movie theater?
- **How much time** will it take him to read that thick book?
- **How many bags** of coffee will we need in a year if each bag makes 50 cups and Dad drinks two cups a day? (Answer: 15)



Encourage your child to check his estimates by working through the problems.

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math: The Middle School Years*, University of California at Berkeley.

## Tell your child why honesty matters

Honesty is vital to academic success. Your child won't learn algebra by copying a friend's answers. And he won't become a better writer by handing in someone else's English paper. Stress with your child that:

- **"Honesty is the best policy"** is more than a saying. Being honest will keep your middle schooler out of trouble.
- **Honest people have self-respect.** They know who they are, and they never have to worry about being caught in a lie.
- **Honest people are respected** by others. They can be counted on to do as they say.
- **Honesty means taking responsibility** for mistakes and trying to fix them.
- **Honesty will earn him more trust.** When you know you can trust your child, you are more likely to grant him privileges. His teachers may also give him more freedom.

Source: B.A. Lewis, *Being Your Best: Character Building for Kids 7-10*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Is your child ready to learn?

Attendance is more than just showing up. It's also being on time, ready to be productive.

Remind your child that she'll do better if she gets to class with enough time to get out her materials, review yesterday's work and think about any questions she needs to ask.



Source: J.G. Thompson, *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher*, Jossey-Bass.



## How do I help my child cope with long-term projects?

**Q:** My child does fine on day-to-day assignments, but long-term projects like research papers send him into a panic. How can I help him tackle these assignments more effectively?

**A:** The keys to helping your child manage major projects are organization and moral support. Help your child approach big assignments as a series of smaller ones. To keep him from getting overwhelmed:



- **Build your child's confidence.** Remind him that he already has the skills he needs to handle big projects. If he's intimidated by a research paper, say, "Remember, it's just a matter of finding information. Then you organize it and write it down. You already do that every day." A little encouragement means a lot.
- **Teach your child to use an assignment calendar.** Have him mark down the dates of upcoming projects. Then, if he has a project due on the 22nd, help him divide it into parts and write down "mini-deadlines" for each part. For example, he could write "outline due" on the 3rd and "rough draft due" on the 12th.
- **Offer support.** Schoolwork is your child's responsibility, but you can be supportive. As deadlines approach (look at his calendar for specific dates), give gentle reminders. "Four days until your outline is due. How's your research coming along?"



## Do you monitor your child's social life?

Social life plays a big role in middle schoolers' lives, particularly during school breaks. Are you making sure your child's social life is safe and positive? To find out, answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you know** your child's friends?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you have** correct contact information for their parents?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to invite friends over so you can get to know them and supervise activities?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you keep track** of where your child will be, with whom, what she'll be doing and what time she'll be home?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you research** movies and activities beforehand to

verify they are appropriate for your child?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are taking steps to keep your child's social life on track. For each no, try that idea.

"Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him."  
—Booker T. Washington

## Time and time again

Your middle schooler may have learned how to *tell* time, but does he have a true *understanding* of time—how long it takes to accomplish a task, for example? To help your child learn to manage time:

- **Use analog clocks.** Moving hands reinforce the idea of time passing.
- **Have him write down** an estimate of how long it will take to do a task. Once the task is done, he should also record how long it really took. He may be surprised at the difference!

Source: D. Goldberg and J. Zwiebel, *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond*, Fireside.

## Freedom and responsibility are interlocked

As kids get older, they must learn that increased freedom comes with increased responsibility. By now, your middle schooler should know that she needs to do schoolwork and chores. If she slips up, give her low-key prompts. "I won't remind you to finish your homework. I know you're responsible enough to do it on your own."



## Expect and model respect

Believe it or not, your child is looking to you for guidance on how to behave. By teaching him to respect you, himself and others, you'll help him be a grounded, decent student. To do it:

- **Be a parent, not a friend.** Your child needs you to be an authority figure. Earn his respect by being reliable and steady.
- **Be tough when necessary.** Be reasonable but firm when dealing with your child. Don't give in to nagging.

Source: J. Taylor, Ph.D., *Your Children Are Under Attack: How Popular Culture is Destroying Your Kids' Values, and How You Can Protect Them*, Sourcebooks, Inc.

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