

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



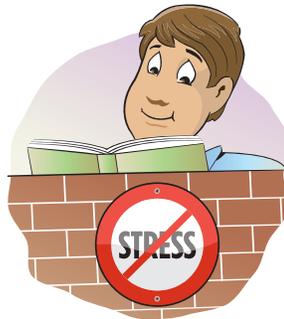
February 2014

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Block the stress that can block your child's ability to learn

Middle school students often have a lot on their plates—and on their minds. They can easily become overwhelmed, and the results aren't good. Anxiety goes up—grades go down. If you see signs of stress, encourage your child to:

- **Enjoy time with a friend.** Suggest that they do something that makes both of them laugh, such as watching a favorite funny movie.
- **Spend time outdoors.** Exercise is important, but so is time just to breathe fresh air and enjoy nature, even if it's cold outside!
- **Listen to favorite music.** Your child can even experiment with listening while studying. Music helps some students relax, focus and stay on task. Other students are distracted by it. Help your child figure out what works best for him.
- **Spend time with a hobby** (other than playing video games). Paint, read, collect, do puzzles, you name it—hobbyists usually “lose themselves” in what they are doing for a while, which helps to defeat stress.
- **Breathe deeply.** Research shows this truly works. Practicing deep breathing for a brief time each day can lower stress levels and provide an instant “tool” for your child to reach for when he feels overwhelmed.
- **Stretch.** Try a few minutes of relaxing music and slow, gentle stretches. Your child can combine deep breathing with this, too.



Source: “12 Healthy Ways to Relax,” WebMD, <http://fit.webmd.com/teen/recharge/slideshow/slideshow-teen-relax>.



## To encourage responsibility, help your child contribute to your community

It's a myth that kids are lazy. The truth is that they want to feel like their contributions matter. When you help your child pitch in, you may also nurture her sense of responsibility toward the people around her. Try having her:

- **Join a service organization** near home or at school. Try to find one that aligns with her strengths. If she's handy, for example, she may thrive in a group that repairs things.
- **Help a neighbor.** Is the older gentleman down the street house-bound by a snowfall? Ask your child to grab a shovel and dig in.
- **Send a thank-you note** to a favorite teacher, firefighter or police officer to express appreciation for their service. Your child will learn how nice it feels when one responsible member of society applauds another!

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

## Overcome a mid-year slump

You can help lift your child out of the “midyear blahs” by recognizing his frustration. Encourage him to set specific goals he can work toward. Then cheer him on! A new school activity that shifts his attention may help him feel motivated again.



## Is math a challenge? Affirm, read and get help

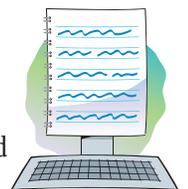
In middle school, math becomes more complex. You may feel unable to help your child. But there are many things you can do:

- **Be positive.** Don't say “Ugh, I never had a clue about this stuff.” Try, “This is demanding work. But I think you can handle it.”
- **Read the directions** together. What is the problem asking for?
- **Encourage her to talk** to the teacher if she still doesn't understand. Empower her to ask for help when she needs it.

Source: Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools, “101 Simple Ways to Help Your Child with Math,” [www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Pubs/MathTips.pdf](http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Pubs/MathTips.pdf).

## Build writing skills—the digital way

Your child may prefer to communicate via texts and social media. But good writing is too vital to be swapped for 140-character tweets! To keep his skills sharp:



- **Help your child** start a family blog. Have him update it often. (Make it invitation-only to keep it private.)
- **Demand proper grammar.** If he uses “e-shorthand” when texting you, say, “I love your abbreviations, but let's try texting actual sentences.”



## How do I urge my child to share problems with me?

**Q:** There's clearly something bothering my seventh grader, but she refuses to open up to me. How can I get her to tell me what's going on without being pushy?

**A:** Middle schoolers are often tight-lipped when it comes to sharing with their parents. But you must keep trying. Although it's likely that the issue that's troubling her is relatively minor, you need to find out what it is. To persuade her to share without feeling pressured by you:

- **Let her know you're concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what."
- **Be clear about your expectations.** "I respect that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to mull it over by yourself, but we will get to the bottom of this tonight."
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your child still refuses to talk—even under threat of punishment—go to a teacher, coach, guidance counselor or other trusted figure in her life. Ask this person to help you uncover what's troubling your child.



Source: Dr. N.I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't*, Workman Publishing.



## Do you teach kindness to others as a way of life for your child?

Thoughtless or mean behavior makes school life difficult. Take this quiz to see if you are promoting kindness in your child. Answer *yes* to things you do always or often and answer *no* to things you do rarely or never.

- \_\_\_\_\_ **1. I model kindness** for my child by treating him—and all others—with kindness and respect.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **2. I tell my child** that the Golden Rule (treat others as you would like to be treated) is a very important value in our family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **3. I promote empathy** in my child. "Remember how you felt when you didn't get invited to Adam's party?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ **4. I praise my child** when I catch him being kind to somebody.

- \_\_\_\_\_ **5. I encourage my child** to befriend a wide variety of students.

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers means you are modeling kindness as a value for your child. If you have more no answers, try some of the ideas from the quiz.

*"Children are a great comfort in your old age—and they help you reach it faster, too."*  
—Lionel Kauffman

## To promote reading skills, 'think outside the book'

Reading is critical to learning. There are more ways than ever to expose your child to words. Have your child:

- **Listen to a book.** Audio books are a great resource, especially if your child struggles with fluency. Visit the American Library Association's "Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults": [www.ala.org/yalsa/amazing-audiobooks/2013](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/amazing-audiobooks/2013).
- **Read online.** E-books may include graphics, videos or links that can help hold a reader's attention. Visit Online Books: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu>.

## Redirect your child's focus to improve self-esteem

The middle school years can be rough on your child's self-esteem. She may feel she comes up short when compared with others. Encourage her to:

- **Remember** that this time is temporary.
- **Learn** a new skill or try something new.
- **List** positive things in her life every day.

## Activate a drive for success

It's frustrating when you know your child could do well in school, but he seems not to want to. If a lecture were the answer, there would be no underachievers. Instead, try to:



- **Recognize improvements.** You may not be thrilled with his C. But if the last grade was a D, that's progress. Say, "you brought your grade up. I believe in you."
- **Enlist friends.** Tell your child, "Maybe studying would be easier if you and Michael did it together. Let's invite him."

Source: "How to Motivate an Underachiever," FamilyEducation.com, <http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-issues/support/39283.html>.

### Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: Erika Beasley. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2014, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1021