

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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The way you talk with your child can improve her critical thinking

In middle school, your child's teachers expect her to do more than just answer questions. She will have to support her answers and opinions with examples from her reading and experience. To help your child practice this type of critical thinking:



- **Dive deep** into your talks with her. Take time to really discuss various topics, from the upcoming science fair to the weather. The more you and your child explore things in depth, the more opportunities she'll have to think.
- **Don't rush** to supply answers. Help your child think things through for herself. Ask questions to help her figure it out. For example, if she asks, "Which sport shall I try out for?" you could ask, "Which do you most enjoy? Is one more challenging than another?"
- **Ask her to explain** herself. When your middle schooler reaches a decision about something, have her put her thought process into words. "I'm excited you chose basketball. Tell me how you made that decision." Explaining her choice will clarify it in her mind.
- **Withhold judgement.** You may not agree with your middle schooler's way of thinking on every topic, but you should still respect her right to think for herself.

Source: A.J. Le Storti, "Developing Thinking in the Gifted," Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, niswc.com/thinking.



Use three strategies for good behavior

The good behavior you expect from your child at home will likely carry over into school. That's great, because well-behaved students are able to focus on learning. But which discipline methods work best with middle schoolers? Try a combination of these proven strategies:

1. **Rules Strategy.** Decide on the rules your child must follow. Agree on the consequences for breaking the rules. Always apply the consequences when the rules are broken.
2. **Domino Strategy.** Knock over one domino and others will fall. In the same way, your child's action (or lack of action) makes other things happen. If he forgets

his homework, he'll face the consequence of a falling grade. (Don't use this strategy if the consequences could affect his safety.)

3. **Caught You Being Good Strategy.** Instead of focusing on what your child does wrong, comment on what he does right. It may make him do it again!

Source: T. McMahon, *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents with Kids 11 to 19*, Gallery Books.

Make your home a haven

Today's world is full of stresses on students and parents alike. Sadly, stress can have a negative effect on your child's grades.



To reduce stress in your home:

- **Remember the big three:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise.
- **Share good things.** Each day over dinner, have family members report at least one good thing that happened.
- **Cope with tension.** Teach your child to take deep breaths, go for a walk or listen to favorite music when she feels stressed.

Source: A. Marks, M.D. and B. Rothbart, M.S.W., *Healthy Teens, Body and Soul: A Parent's Complete Guide*, Touchstone.

Read books—and more!

There are more ways to read than simply sitting down with a book. To fill your child's life with reading, try challenging him to beat you in a board game that involves reading. Or have him read the directions as you do a project together, such as installing a piece of computer equipment.

Teach online social safety

Social media abuse is a growing problem in middle schools. So it's critical that you help your child make safe choices about Internet use. Talk to your child about:



- **Consequences.** Nothing can ever be completely removed from the Internet. She should not post anything that could hurt her reputation, or someone else's.
- **Online "friends."** One rule to set for your child: Allow only people you know in real life to view your posts.
- **Safety.** Your child should never post personal information or agree to meet anyone she knows only online.

Source: R. Erb, "Social-media abuse rampant in middle, high school," USA Today, niswc.com/online.rules.



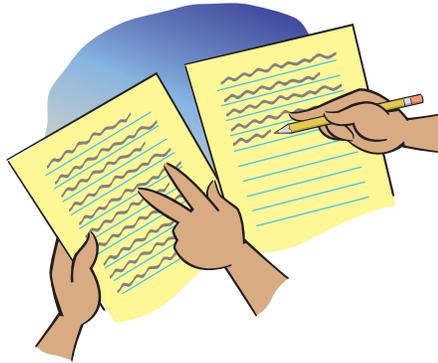
How can I put an end to my child's cheating?

Q: I caught my son copying all the answers from his friend's homework. What should I do?

A: Unfortunately, many middle schoolers turn to cheating. Kids this age are highly aware of how they compare to peers and may view cheating as a way to keep up.

Cheating is serious, but you can keep it from turning into a more severe problem. To start:

- **Ask your child why he cheated.** Is he afraid of disappointing you or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades? Is he trying to get special rewards for top grades? Stress the importance of learning for its own sake. And make sure your son knows that you will love him no matter what grades he earns.
- **Send a clear message** to your child that cheating is wrong. It's dishonest and unfair to those who don't cheat. And it robs your child of learning skills and information he needs to succeed in life.
- **Help your child improve** his study habits, so he can make better grades on his own. Make sure he has a regular study time each day.
- **Talk to your child's teachers** about how to get help if he has fallen behind. There may be another student who could work with him. And if the cheating persists, work with the school counselor to find solutions.



What does your child do after school?

There are plenty of opportunities for middle schoolers to get into trouble after school—especially if no adult is at home with them. Are you doing all you can to make your child's time after school safe? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you make sure** your child contacts an adult after school, such as a parent, neighbor or sitter?
- ___ **2. Do you keep in touch** with your child by phone when she is out of school and you are not there?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extracurricular activities?
- ___ **4. Have you established** rules about who is allowed in the house when you are not there?

- ___ **5. Have you discussed** the risks that kids on their own face and how to avoid them?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are taking steps to keep your child safe after school. For each no, try that idea.

"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."

—Stacia Tauscher

Share tips for class notes

Your child's ability to take good class notes will be a key to her success in school from now on. Share these tips:

- **Don't write down every word.** Encourage your child to come up with symbols and abbreviations for words.
- **Edit notes after class.** She should read her notes and expand on them while the teacher's words are fresh in her mind.
- **Review notes each evening.** This helps solidify the material in her memory. And she can highlight what she doesn't understand and ask about it the next day.

Source: "Note-Taking Tips for Students," The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., niswc.com/classnotes.

Step onto the college path

Did you know that middle school is the right time to begin preparing for college? Experts recommend that students take some challenging classes (algebra, for example) in middle school when possible. This lets them take more advanced classes—that help with college admission—in high school. Talk with your child's counselor to learn more.

Source: "A middle school parent's college prep guide," GreatKids, niswc.com/college.

Prepare to ease test anxiety

Many students suffer from test anxiety. Happily, there are lots of ways to relieve your child's fears and help him prepare for any test. Here are some to try:



- **Ask why your child is nervous.** Talking can ease his worries.
- **Help him make a study schedule.** Set aside study time on several days leading up to the test. Discourage cramming.
- **Remind him of his strengths.** "You've studied hard. You can do this."

Source: "Helping Your Child with Test-Taking: Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, niswc.com/relief.

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