

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



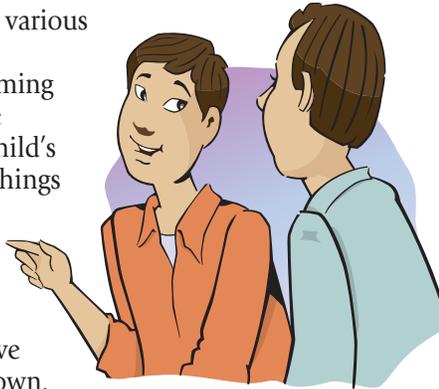
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Think about those thinking skills

With every passing year, your child's brain gets stronger and more complex. In 2011, make an effort to boost your middle schooler's brainpower by helping him sharpen his thinking skills. Here's what you can do:

- **Take the time to really discuss** various topics together. Don't rush through conversations. Whether it's the upcoming science fair or the baseball series, the more you show an interest in your child's thoughts and opinions and explore things in depth, the more opportunities you'll be giving him to think.
- **Don't swoop in** with an answer when your child is struggling with a question. Instead, step back and give him a chance to mull it over on his own.
- **Ask him to explain himself.** When your middle schooler reaches a decision about something, have him put his thought process into words. "I see that you decided to try out for soccer. What made you choose soccer instead of baseball?" By explaining to you how he made his decision, he'll be clarifying it in his own head.
- **Be respectful of his opinions.** You may not agree with your middle schooler's way of thinking on every topic, but try to withhold judgment and respect his ideas. If it's a nonnegotiable topic—like your family's stance on alcohol—explain that to your child.



Source: A. Le Storti, "Developing Thinking in the Gifted," The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, www.giftedpage.org/docs/bulletins/PageBulletinDevelopingThinking.pdf.

Motivation or bribery: Which is it?

A child who expects something in return for accomplishing even the smallest task is not motivated. Make sure your efforts at motivation are not just different ways to bribe your child. Consider the following points:

- **Do you try to bargain** with your child? "If you clean your room, I'll get you those new shoes everybody has." When your child expects new shoes in return for cleaning her room, it's a *bribe*.
- **Does your child understand** the value of what she needs to do? If she knows that studying helps her master the material and prepare for tests, that is *motivation*. If you stress studying, and she does it because you pay for grades, that's a *bribe*.
- **Does your child understand** that she has to work before she plays? She chooses the "play," such as hanging out with a friend. You provide the motivating statement: "When you have completed your homework, then you can go to Kelsey's house."

Source: Jody Johnston Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, ISBN: 1-929643-34-9, Ambris Publishing.

You make the difference!

Giving your child academic encouragement and support shows her that school is really important. You can:

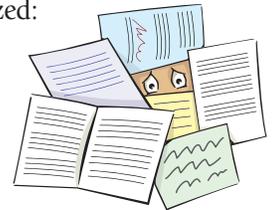
- **Be a resource.** This *never* means doing the work for her. Instead, be available to answer questions and offer guidance.
- **Talk about** what your child is learning. Grades are important, but it's equally important to emphasize the process.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent*, ISBN: 0-8077-4808-4, Teachers College Press.

Being well-organized is key

Does clutter stress you out? Your middle schooler may feel the same. To help him stay organized:

- **Make** sure he has all the materials he needs for schoolwork.
- **Post** a calendar for keeping track of assignments and activities.
- **Help** him break down large assignments into smaller tasks.

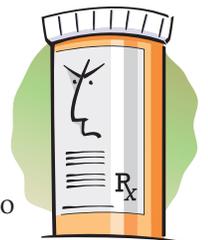


Guard against drug abuse

The easiest drug for your child to get may be right in your medicine cabinet.

All medications should be used only as directed. To make sure your child isn't abusing drugs right at home:

- **Keep** close track of prescription medications.
- **Keep** over-the-counter medications on hand only when necessary.
- **Warn** your child never to share her medication or take someone else's.



Source: Neil I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble*, ISBN: 0-7611-1570-6, Workman Publishing.



How can parents help struggling students excel?

Q: My middle schooler did not do very well the first half of the school year. How can I make sure she does better during the second half?

A: The New Year is a great opportunity for “starting over.” Encourage your child to make a fresh start by sticking to some good school habits. Here’s how:

- **Insist on a regular homework time.** If she’s freshest right after school, then make that her work time. But if she does better with a little rest first, give her an hour before having her crack open the books. Either way, have her stick to her scheduled time as much as possible.
- **Enforce bedtime.** Don’t let her stay up for “just one more TV show.” There’s a good chance she’s not getting enough sleep. Research shows that tired kids don’t perform as well in school—and growing middle schoolers need a lot of sleep. Decide on a reasonable hour.
- **Monitor her progress.** Don’t wait until she fails a quiz to discover she’s struggling in class. Touch base regularly with her teachers.
- **Set reasonable goals.** If she earned straight C’s last time, see if she can bring at least some of her grades up to B’s.



Are you encouraging self-sufficiency?

Middle school students gain self-esteem from being able to do things on their own. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you’re encouraging independence and responsibility in your child:

___ **1. Do you expect** your child to assume responsibility for his own schoolwork? ___ **5. Do you expect** your child to care for his personal needs and belongings?

___ **2. Do you offer** your child tools (such as a calendar for writing down assignments) that can help him complete tasks on his own? **How did you do?** *Each yes answer means you are helping your child be more self-sufficient. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to try new things and to stick with them until he succeeds?

___ **4. Do you teach** your child to do tasks that help the family and will prepare him for life, such as washing clothes and making appointments?

“We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today.”
—Stacia Tauscher

Consider how you speak about your middle schooler

You may think he is deep into a video game. But children perk up their ears when they hear their names.

The way you talk about your child with others can have a major effect on him. Here are some points to consider:

- **Negative comments are damaging.** This includes when you make them to his other parent or another relative.
- **Avoid comparing your child** to other kids—especially his siblings.

Source: Sylvia Rimm, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades*, ISBN: 0-910707-87-1, Great Potential Press.

Find ways to get involved

You can build a strong partnership with your child’s school by:

- **Staying in touch.** Check in with your child’s teacher by calling or emailing.
- **Taking an interest.** “What was the most interesting thing you learned in school?”

Source: “Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement,” National Network of Partnership Schools, www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm.

Share paper-writing tips

Good essays are built on good paragraphs. To build a paragraph your child should:

- **Pick a topic** and write a topic sentence. This sentence tells what the paragraph is about. For example, “Skateboarding is the most challenging sport I have ever tried.”
- **Select details** that support the topic sentence. These answer the question *why*. “Keeping my balance on a fast-moving wheeled board took me months to learn.”



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