

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



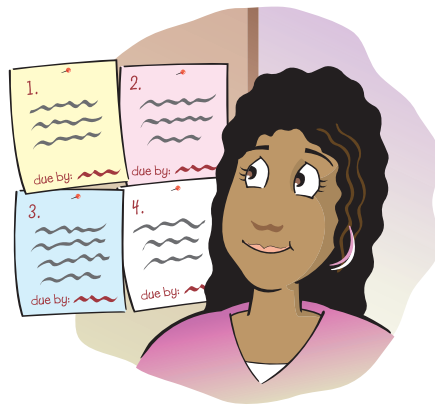
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Resolve to help your child make (and keep!) academic resolutions

It's New Year's resolution time again! This year, encourage your child to come up with a few school-related resolutions for herself. If she's stumped about where to start, suggest she make resolutions regarding:

- **Projects.** If your child typically puts off big assignments until the last moment, help her turn over a new leaf. The next time a book report or a research paper looms, she should break it into small parts and assign a deadline for each part. That way she can tackle one piece at a time.
- **Homework.** If your child's study habits are haphazard, refine them. Instead of letting her hit the books "whenever and wherever," help her designate a single work area. She can resolve to keep it organized and, if possible, use it only for studying. Look together at her after-school schedule. Figure out the best time for studying and make that part of her daily routine.
- **Extracurricular activities.** If your child signs up for every team or club that comes her way, she may be spreading herself too thin. As she begins the second half of the year, talk about which activities can stay and which should go. And remember: School comes first. No activity—regardless of how much she enjoys it—should interfere with academics.



You don't have to be a pal

To help your child become a responsible student, be her parent, not her friend. For example, if she frets about a "horrible" teacher, don't reduce the teacher's authority by agreeing, "Yes, she's awful."

Instead, say "I'm sorry you're having trouble with your teacher. I'm sure you can work it out." You'll show you care and let her know what you expect her to do.

Get your writer writing

In middle school, your child must do a higher level of writing than in elementary school. To help him overcome any writer's block, have him:



- **Brainstorm about the assignment.** Can he read it and write down five words that come to mind?
- **Write one sentence.** Tell your child if he writes just one sentence, he can take a break. Later he can write another.
- **Use resources,** such as a dictionary.
- **Take notes.** He won't forget ideas if he jots them down as he thinks of them.

Source: R.G. Richards, "Understanding Why Students Avoid Writing," AdLit.org, niswc.com/onesentence.



True or false: Test wording matters

True-false test questions may seem simple, but they aren't always easy. To help your child do his best answering them, remind him that it is critical to pay attention to the wording of each question. He should:

- **Watch for words** such as *never* and *always*. When they appear, it usually means every part of the statement must be correct for *true* to be the right answer.
- **Remember that words** such as *sometimes* or *generally* mean most of the statement must be accurate for *true* to be correct.
- **Keep in mind that** if any part of the statement is incorrect, then

the answer is *false*. But if any part of it is correct, it does not automatically mean the answer is *true*.

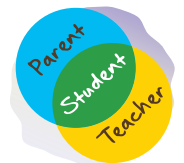
Your child should find out ahead of time whether there's a penalty for guessing (especially on standardized tests). If there isn't, tell him to go ahead and guess. He's got a 50-50 shot of picking the right answer!

Source: "True-False Test Tips-Help," TestTakingTips.com, niswc.com/true-false.

Stay involved with school

Research says that middle schoolers' grades, scores, attendance and behavior are all better when their parents are involved in their schooling. But there are other benefits, too:

- **Parents understand** more about how the school works.
- **Parents know whom** to call with concerns.
- **Teachers understand more** about their students' families, and are better able to respond to the children's needs.



Source: Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level, Project Appleseed.



How can I motivate my child to do his best work?

Q: My middle schooler does all right, but he's not working up to his potential. When I ask why, he says, "School's not that important." Where is he getting this from? What should I do about it?

A: Odds are, he's getting it from different places. Popular culture may seem to say that school matters. But kids often absorb a subtle—and completely opposite—message. That's because they are constantly exposed to:



- **Unique success stories.** Tales of self-made millionaires who abandoned school are common. Your child may be thinking, "He got rich without studying hard. I can, too." Remind him that these people are exceptions to the rule and that his best chance for success is taking school seriously.
- **Celebrations of ignorance.** The most popular characters on TV are often not-so-bright jokesters. Watch TV with your child and discuss ways the characters do and do not embody your family's values.
- **Complaints from parents.** Did you work hard in school and get a great job? And do you constantly complain about that job? Make sure you are sending the right message. Ask your child about school every day, and point out ways your education has helped you.

Source: C.C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*, Broadway Books.



Do you take action to boost success?

The start of a new calendar year is a good time to consider whether you are taking all the steps you can to support your child's academic success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child manage homework, but resist doing it for her? Does she have a homework routine?
2. **Do you take** an interest in your child's schoolwork and in what goes on at school?
3. **Do you stay** in contact with your child's teachers and counselor?
4. **Do you make** it clear to your child that she must follow school rules and policies?
5. **Do you let** your child know her effort is important to you,

and that she should be proud of herself?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child live up to her full potential. For each no, try that idea.

"Children must be taught how to think, not what to think."

—Margaret Mead

Put respect into action

Many middle schoolers aren't sure what respect really is. But if your child is going to succeed in school and life, he needs to learn to respect others and himself. Help him:

- **Think first.** He can ask himself, "Would I like to be treated this way?" A *yes* answer means he is about to act respectfully.
- **Use words to disagree.** He can disagree with someone and still respect them. But respect involves words, not fists.
- **Take care of property.** He should leave things as he found them, or better.
- **Distance himself** from uncivil peers.

Source: "Activities on Respect for Middle School Students" ehow.com, niswc.com/thinkfirst.

Support homework effort

As your child's homework gets more complicated, you may feel less able to help. But you *are* a valuable resource. You can:

- **Suggest** books or websites your child can consult for information.
- **Share** organization tips.
- **Tell** her you have confidence in her ability to do the work.



Arrive on time, every day

Did your child have a strong attendance record in 2014? If not, now is a perfect time to turn it around. Consider this research:

- **A study of middle school students** in New York City found that those who improved attendance during middle school were more likely to graduate from high school.
- **A study of middle school students** in Philadelphia found that attendance in middle school was linked to math achievement.

Source: R. Balfanz and V. Byrnes, "The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools," Everyone Graduates Center, niswc.com/studies.

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