

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Educational Service Unit 10

Reading is learning—so make the most of your child's time online

In today's world, your child cannot be a complete reader unless she is also proficient at reading online. You may think surfing the Internet is a waste of time. (Sometimes it is!) But many of the projects your child will do in school—not to mention work at jobs she'll want later—will require good online reading skills. Here are some tips for your child to follow when reading online:

- **Use thinking skills.** If your child is doing an Internet search, the results will likely list a variety of websites. She should ask herself questions like: "Is this site relevant to the schoolwork I am doing? Do I know who wrote this site? Is the author trustworthy?"
- **Read more than just the words.** Online reading can be wonderful for visual learners. With a click or two, your child can bring up photos, charts and graphs that support what she's reading. Websites are good for other learning styles, too. Your child may be able to click on an audio or video file to supplement the text. And since browsing requires using eyes and hands together, it engages hands-on learners.
- **Use predicting skills.** Rarely do Internet users go to one site and stay there. Most sites include links to other sites. But your child shouldn't just click without thinking. Instead, she should ask: "Why am I being asked to click to this other site? What information will it give me? Will it help?"



Source: J. Atlas, "Reading, Writing, and Technology," International Reading Association, www.reading.org/InformationFor/Parents.aspx.



Speak out for safety at school

Safety is one area of school life that many parents don't think much about—until an incident occurs. But your child can't learn if he doesn't feel safe.

You will help make school a safe environment for your child if you:

- **Learn what the school does** to keep students safe. Support these efforts. Encourage your child to follow school rules.
- **Speak out against bullying.** Make it clear to your child that bullying is always wrong. But also wrong is being a "bystander," or watching bullying occurring but staying silent. Tell your child to

come to you with any knowledge he has of bullying. Inform the school of any episodes.

- **Volunteer, if you can,** in a way that helps student safety. For example, offer to watch the door during a school event. If your child protests, explain that your help is needed to keep the program safe and fun for all students.

Source: J. Shea, "Parents Can Help Make Schools Safer," National PTA, <http://tinyurl.com/pyc3y1p>.

Help your middle schooler find a place to fit in

If your child feels left out in school because he doesn't know how to join in, help him explore his interests. Is there a new sport or activity he likes? Find out what's available that might be a match. "I know you haven't thought of joining the yearbook committee, but you love graphic design. You might meet kids who like it, too."

Create reading fun with a parent-child book club

Books such as *The Hunger Games* have been wildly popular with both adults and adolescents. Build on this mutual interest and get your child reading by starting a parent-child book club. Here's how:

- **Get your child on board.**
- **Ask friends,** yours and your child's, to join in.
- **Pick a place to meet:** Your home, a library.
- **Bring ideas.** Suggest books that are age-appropriate. Ask a librarian for titles.
- **Meet again in a month** for book talk and friendship. Select a new book.



Recharge your child's homework batteries

By March, after months of hard work in school, many children slack off on homework. You'll keep your child on track if you:

- **Stress time management.** Help her make a weekly homework planner.
- **Check on assignments** with her teacher if your child repeatedly says she has no homework.
- **Promote organization.** Ask how she's tracking assignments? Keeping papers in her binder? Brainstorm some ideas for better organization.





Steer a course with your child through adolescence

As your child navigates the often choppy waters of the middle school years, your attention is still vital. But you may need to be more hands-off. You'll give her the principles and self-awareness she needs to succeed in school and afterward if you:

- **Share your values.** Tell her how you feel about loyalty, honesty, responsibility and other things you hold dear.
- **Offer guidance, not judgment.** Discuss various ways she might handle a situation. Be open-minded.
- **Acknowledge your differences.**
- **Show affection.** Tell her you love her and believe in her.

Source: "Parenting a Preteen or Teen," Palo Alto Medical Foundation, <http://tinyurl.com/329v1m>.

Four questions improve reading for meaning

Your child may read fluently, but does he understand what he reads? Have him ask himself: What is the author's purpose? What is the main idea? Where is the evidence? What would I add?



Source: "Reading for Meaning Questions," Colorado State University, <http://tinyurl.com/orxmcn8>.

Don't let failure stop success

In middle school, classes are challenging. Tests require more study. And organization is more necessary than ever. You can't always prevent your child from failing, but you can help her rebound. Try these tips:

- **Be a role model.** Adults fail too. Show her you are always trying to do better.
- **Emphasize effort.** Be sure she knows that ability is not the only key to success.

Source: L. Clark, "Helping Children Achieve Success and Learn from Failure," The Ohio State University Extension, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm01/pdf/FS14.pdf>.

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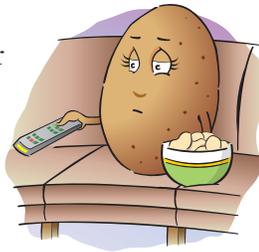
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Q&A How can I help my child stay fit without nagging?

Q: My eighth grader is in good shape, but now that she doesn't take P.E. or play sports anymore, I worry about her becoming a "couch potato." I want her to be fit, so she can learn well and take part in school activities. How can I keep her healthy, without turning into a drill sergeant?

A: You're wise to pay attention to your child's physical fitness. Good health is key to doing better in school. The tricky part—especially during the body-conscious middle school years—is to keep her focused on wellness, not weight. To help your child stay fit while maintaining a positive attitude toward her body and food:

- **Turn off the tube.** Studies show that kids who watch more than four hours of TV daily are heavier than those who watch fewer than two. Invite your child to join you on a bike ride or a walk.
- **Shop for healthy foods** for the whole family. Good nutrition will give her energy to move. If there are too many sugary, processed goodies in your home, commit to shopping differently.
- **Invite her into the kitchen.** Involve your child in meal planning and preparation. She may begin to care about the elements of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Treat food as fuel.** Don't give it power by turning it into something she "earns" if she's good or "loses" if she's bad.



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.

Parent Quiz

Are you easy for your child to talk to?

Middle school is a time of change. Your child needs you to be the constant in his life. He must be sure he can come to you when he needs to talk.

Take this quiz to see if you and your child are communicating well. Answer *yes* to things you do often. Answer *no* to things you do rarely or never.

1. **Do you have** regular conversations with your child?
2. **Do you strive** to remain calm even when you and your child are disagreeing?
3. **Do you respect** your child's point of view, and require that he do the same for you?
4. **Do you use non-verbal** cues, such as: smiles, "thumbs up" and hugs?

- ___ 5. **Do you work** with your child to find solutions that let you avoid nagging?

How did you score?

More yes answers mean you are working to keep the lines of communication open. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"There are few situations in life more difficult to cope with than an adolescent son or daughter during the attempt to liberate themselves."

—Anna Freud