

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



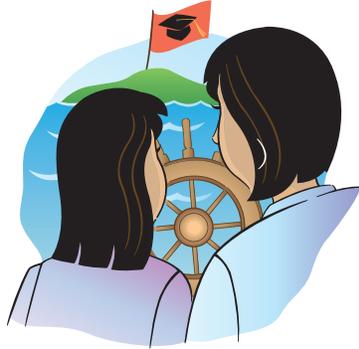
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Steer your middle schooler on a course to high school graduation

Students can't achieve success in school if they don't show up in class. And attendance is especially important in middle school. Many students who eventually drop out of high school start down that path in sixth, seventh or eighth grade. Studies have shown that sixth-grade students are up to 75 percent more likely to drop out when they:

- **Miss class 20 percent or more** of the time. That's just one day a week.
- **Fail language arts or math courses.**
- **Earn poor grades in a core course** because of behavior issues.



The good news is that parents can intervene and steer middle schoolers down the right path. Here's how:

- **Be clear that you expect** your child to attend all her classes every day.
- **Work as a team** with your child's teachers.
- **Motivate your child** to work hard and do her best. Talk about school every day. You'll show her that education is a priority.
- **Let your child know** that you believe she can succeed.
- **Encourage your child** to get involved in an extracurricular activity. Students whose connection to their school goes beyond academics are more likely to stay in school.

Source: R. Balfanz and V. Byrnes, "The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools," Johns Hopkins University, niswc.com/stopdropout.



Make time alone safe and productive

Sometimes your middle schooler must arrive home after school to an empty house. Even intelligent, mature and capable kids need specific guidelines for being home alone. To make sure your child stays safe and uses the time for schoolwork:

- **Prepare for emergencies.** Practice with your child what to do in case of fire, severe weather or other urgent scenarios. Never assume he "just knows" what procedures he should follow.
- **Write down the rules.** Whether it's "no having friends over" or "no turning on the oven," post rules where he can see them.
- **Insist that he check in.** Your child should call or text you when he gets home.
- **Help him plan his time.** "Take 45 minutes to relax, and then tackle your homework."
- **Create a Plan B.** Keys get lost. Doors jam. Make sure your child has a back-up plan if he can't get into the house for some reason.

Overcome attitude obstacles

If your child struggles with a school subject, it doesn't mean he's destined to a life of problems. But if he also has an "adolescent attitude," it can derail his efforts to improve.



Your patience and enthusiastic support will help. Show him you are "in this together." He may be more willing to work hard!

Thinking is the key to reading comprehension

Your child's ability to understand what she reads is vital in all subjects. As she reads, ask her to think about:



- **The author's purpose.** Is it to entertain? To persuade?
- **The main idea.** What is it? Which details from the text support it?
- **The sequence of events.**
- **Relationships.** How do the events affect the outcome?
- **The characters.** How do their feelings affect their actions?

Source: "For Middle Schoolers: Activities to Build College-Level Reading Skills," AdLit.org, niswc.com/comprehend.

These websites won't waste your child's time

Does your child love to surf on the Internet? Have him try out these websites:

- **American Memory** <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/today/today.html>. This Library of Congress site details historical events that occurred on today's date.
- **Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids** <http://bensguide.gpo.gov> is helpful for learning civics and government.
- **AAA Math** www.aaamath.com offers instruction and worksheets through the eighth grade level.



How do I handle a child that seems to *try* to be irritating?

Q: My son is doing well in school, but he is driving me crazy at home. He zones out when I'm speaking to him and seems to take great pleasure in annoying me. Why is he trying so hard to upset me?

A: It's great that your son is doing well in school. But since many children try out behaviors at home before taking them to school, your child's home environment plays a big role in his academic success. It's important to deal with his behavior in positive ways.



There is actually a good chance your child isn't *trying* to annoy you. In fact, it's possible his behavior isn't directed at you at all. What matters is your response. Some psychologists believe there are two kinds of parents:

- **Positive thinkers.** These parents feel their kids are basically good. When their kids "zone out," they call it distraction, not misbehavior. They're also likely to stay calm when faced with annoying behavior.
- **Negative thinkers.** These parents see their kids' frustrating behavior as disrespectful. Even worse, they believe it's targeted at them. They're apt to react angrily to irritating behavior, no matter what its cause.

Try giving your child the benefit of the doubt and acknowledge that he is a normal—if flighty—adolescent. Don't take his behavior personally. You'll be more likely to react calmly.



Is your child on the path to success?

College and a career are still a few years away, but middle school is a great time to get your child thinking about goals for the future and how to achieve them. Are you preparing your child for a bright future? Answer *yes* or *no*:

- ___ **1. Do you emphasize** to your child the importance of giving school her best efforts? School success leads to success in life.
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child's interests? They are often the first clue to a possible future career.
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** different careers with your child?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to speak to family and friends about what they do for a living and the training required?
- ___ **5. Do you bring** your child to visit your workplace, or that of a family member or friend?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child keep the future in mind. For each no, try that idea.

"Kids get in trouble when no one is paying attention."

—Madeline Levine, Ph.D.

Fair play for science fairs

If your child will be taking part in a science fair, keep in mind that it is supposed to be *his* project. But that doesn't mean you can't be supportive! You can:

- **Discuss topic ideas.** Your child's topic should be something that interests him.
- **Ask about materials.** Take him to buy supplies or do research at the library.
- **Ask about his method.** Have him explain to you how the steps in his experiment will lead to the answer to the question he is asking.
- **Be a willing audience.** Ask your child to practice his presentation for you.

Source: "Parent Resources," Science Buddies, nswc.com/scifair.

Rules build a 'can-do' spirit

The reasonable rules you enforce at home have an impact on your child's success in the classroom. That's because rules teach responsibility.

When your child follows rules or performs tasks responsibly, it reminds her that she's a competent young person. Her confidence can help her take on challenging schoolwork without being intimidated.

Share these note-taking tips

Students who take good notes in class have an advantage when studying for tests. Your child should strive to:



- **Write down important points,** such as names, dates, key events and other highlights. If he isn't sure what's important, he should ask the teacher.
- **Copy notes over at home.** This keeps them neat and helps the points stick in his memory.
- **Compare notes with a friend.** The kids can quiz each other for practice.

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