

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

## Keep learning afloat by boosting your child's organizational skills

Now that your child is in middle school, being organized is more critical than ever before. On top of assignments from six or more teachers, he must manage after-school activities and a busy social life. Organization can make the difference between your child's doing well and sinking. To help him get organized:



- **Have a weekly planning meeting.** Sitting down with your child each Sunday night to plan the upcoming week can make everyone's days go more smoothly. Get out your family calendar and write down important deadlines and events. Your child should also write down deadlines for steps involved in completing any long-range projects.
- **Be sure your child is using a daily planner** to keep track of assignments and activities. He should check it every day before leaving school to see which books and supplies he needs to bring home.
- **Have your child make a checklist** at the start of each homework session of the tasks to be completed.
- **Assign places to put specific belongings.** A box by the front door could hold homework and items that must go back to school, for example. Encourage your child to put things in their designated spots. Set an example by doing this with household items. Have a place for your keys, tape, scissors, mail, cleaning supplies, etc.
- **Have your child wear a watch** and refer to it often.



## Reinforce learning outside school walls

School isn't the only place where your child's education happens. It happens everywhere! To use her time out of school to extend what she's learning:

- **Have your child teach you.** Ask her to explain something she's studying to you. As she "teaches," she reinforces the material in her own memory.
- **Put her education** into action. Show her real-life applications for what she's learning. If it's fractions, for example, say "This recipe calls for half a cup of flour, but we have only a 1/3-cup measure. How can we figure out the right amount?"
- **Expose her to new things.** Meaningful experiences—such as a nature hike or a museum visit—influence your child's learning. Ask her how what she is seeing relates to what she has learned in school.
- **Ask for her help.** Let her use her knowledge and skills. If you make a wrong turn while driving somewhere, hand her a map and ask her to figure out a new route.

## Make time for what matters

Extracurricular activities are great. They can build friendships, teach respect for others and even enhance college applications. But it's crucial to remember that *academics* are the most important part of school.

If your child complains about not having enough time to finish homework, be with the family or just relax, it's probably time to cut back on a few activities.

Source: H. Kimball, "Finding the Balance With After-School Activities," Child Mind Institute, [niscw.com/justright](http://niscw.com/justright).

## Success is contagious!

If your child is struggling in one area, it helps to point out what he's doing right in another. To help him apply his strengths to his challenges:



- **Ask your child** what he thinks he does best and why he is successful with it.
- **Add some positive notes** of your own. "You don't give up easily."
- **Do some brainstorming.** "You did well in history because you asked questions after class. What would happen if you did the same thing in math class?"

Source: L.F. Tracy, *Grounded for Life?! Parenting Press*.

## Independence requires responsibility

Most middle schoolers think independence means getting to do what they want. But it *really* means taking responsibility for themselves and their actions. To boost responsibility:



- **Establish routines** so your child knows what she's supposed to do when.
- **Don't do things for your child** that she can do for herself.
- **Allow her to make some decisions.** Then let her experience the consequences of her choices.



## Should I volunteer if my child doesn't want me to?

**Q:** I'd like to volunteer at my child's school, but she says she would be too embarrassed to have me there. I was hoping for a positive experience for both of us. Should I abandon my plans?

**A:** No! You have a valuable contribution to make as a parent volunteer. And volunteering becomes even more important in middle and high school, when the number of parents willing to pitch in tends to drop.



But you don't want your efforts to sour your relationship with your daughter. To keep her from cringing:

- **Hear her out.** Don't ignore her complaints. Sit down and talk about it. "I realize you don't want me to volunteer at school, but I'd like to know why. Is there something specific you are worried about?"
- **Validate her concerns.** Keep in mind when you talk that kids face social pressure to fit in during middle school. You might say, "Are you afraid your friends will think you are weird if they see me at school?" If she says *yes*, have her put herself in her friends' shoes. Would she find volunteering parents weird? Or would it be no big deal?
- **Compromise.** Don't back down from volunteering, but do respect your child's feelings. If she's still nervous about seeing you in school, volunteer behind the scenes, or in the front office. And if you see her while you are at school, don't make a big deal out of it. Just smile and walk away.



## Do you inspire your child's best effort?

Every student is capable of living up to his own potential. Are you supporting and encouraging your child's very best efforts in school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make** it a point to notice and comment on your child's efforts? "I can see how hard you are working."
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to take pride in his efforts? "It must feel great to know that you hung in there."
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you let** your child see you making an effort?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you point** to effort as the reason for your child's success? Instead of "You're so smart," do you say, "That extra studying each night paid off"?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid** over-focusing on results, as long as your child has given his best effort?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child to do his best. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude."  
—Ralph Marston*

## Make sure the site is right

The Internet is a vast store of information, but not all of it is accurate. When researching online, your child must evaluate the websites and facts she uses. She should:

- **Consider the source.** Is it trying to sell something or push one point of view? When was it last updated?
- **Verify the information** through other sources. If your child finds a surprising "fact" about the solar system on one site, she should be able to confirm it on other reputable science sites if it is really a fact.

Remind your child to cite the URL, along with the author and publisher, if available, of any websites she uses as sources.

Source: K. Schrock, "The 5 W's of Web Site Evaluation," Kathy Schrock's Guide to Everything, [nswc.com/5ws](http://nswc.com/5ws).

## Set rules for safe travels

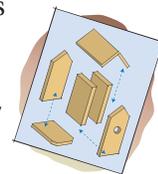
Your child may have reached the age where he is allowed to go without you to school and other places. But it's important that he do so safely. Your child should:

- **Tell you where he's going**, with whom, and when he'll be back.
- **Walk with a buddy**, whenever possible.
- **Have a way** to reach you immediately.

## Share some learning fun

Excite your child about learning by including reading, writing and other skills in special activities you do together. You can:

- **Keep a journal** with your child. Take turns writing entries. End each entry with a question for the other person.
- **Build something**, such as a birdhouse or a bookshelf, with your child. Put her in charge of finding directions, figuring out cost and doing the measurements.
- **Read a book aloud.** Let her pick the book. Take turns reading a chapter.



### Helping Students Learn®

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