

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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A written plan takes the panic out of end-of-year projects

Teachers often assign large projects at the end of a school year. To help your child make steady progress on a big assignment and hand it in on time, have him develop a written plan of action. Having a plan helps your child rely more on himself and less on you—something he'll need to do in high school and college.



Give your child this sample plan for completing a project on time. He can customize it to his assignment. Your child should:

- 1. List the steps** needed to complete the project. For example, research, write a rough draft, edit, write a second draft and make a final copy.
- 2. Set a deadline for finishing each step.** Have him write these deadlines on the family calendar.
- 3. List the help he will need** from you or other people. For example, he might list rides to the library on Tuesday and Saturday.
- 4. List and collect the materials required** for the project, such as books, craft supplies and website URLs.
- 5. Follow the steps** for getting the project finished.
- 6. Proofread and turn in the completed project** on the due date.

When your child follows his plan, he should be able to complete his project on time with a minimum of stress.



Treat 'spring fever' with attendance

When your child has a fever, you keep her home from school. But when it's "spring fever," that's a different matter. As tempting as it may be to let your child stay home because it's a beautiful day outside or there's something fun to do, don't give in. Here are three reasons why:

- 1. End-of-year exams.** In the next few weeks, many students will take exams. The class review going on now is important to your child's success on these tests.
- 2. Schoolwork.** Teachers are still teaching new material. Missing school can cause your child to fall behind—and leave her with very little time to catch up.
- 3. Priorities.** Getting to miss school for fun tells your child that school matters only *some* of the time. Make sure your child knows that school is your family's top priority and that you expect her to be there every day.

Source: H. Arthur, "Every Day Counts: School Attendance Strategies," *Communicator*, National Association of Elementary School Principals, niswc.com/springschool.

Have a healthy summer!

Healthy habits enable your child to do his best in school. But don't let the end of the school year signal the end of those habits. Over the summer, be sure to:

- **Maintain routines.** Keep to a regular schedule, even if your child's bed and waking times are somewhat later.
- **Promote fitness.** Help him find an activity he likes, such as biking or running.
- **Be a healthy role model.** Your child takes his cues from what you do, not what you say.

Make it easier for your child to head to high school

If your child will be starting high school next year, she may be nervous. Take some time this summer to ease her transition. You can:



- **Visit the new school together.** There may be a day for eighth graders to visit. If not, call to schedule a tour.
- **Suggest that your child ask** high school students, "What do you wish you had known before starting high school?"
- **Reassure her.** Rather than talking about how hard high school will be, say things like, "I know you have what it takes to be successful in high school."

Turn on the power of effort

Students do best when they understand that effort, rather than ability, is the key factor in success.



To encourage your child to put in more effort, tackle a project together. Paint a room or take turns reading a classic book aloud. Along the way, tell him, "You are working so hard. I know you can do it."

Source: "Middle School Malaise," American Psychological Association, niswc.com/effortwins.



How can my child brush up on study skills this summer?

Q: My middle schooler has had a pretty good school year, but her study habits need some improvement. Is there a way I can help her work on these skills over summer break?

A: It's terrific that you are thinking about this now instead of waiting until fall. By working on the problems when they are still fresh, you may be better able to help your child solve them.

To start, talk to your child. Ask her what she thinks her strengths and weaknesses are. Is she a strong reader but a poor note-taker, for example? To build her study habits:

- **Encourage pleasure reading.** Take your child to the library every week or two. Let her pick a variety of things to read. Then schedule a daily family reading time. Include time to discuss what your child is reading. Share what you are reading, too.
- **Nurture your child's powers of observation.** Ask her to pick out specific signs or landmarks as you drive around this summer. Have her keep track of the miles she's traveled. The goal is to help her learn to pay attention to details.
- **Get your child writing.** Is she good with computers? Have her write you a "Here's what to do if ..." manual you can use if your computer gives you problems. Or give her a notebook and ask her to keep a journal.



Are you set for a safe, active summer?

Summer vacation often means more freedom for middle schoolers. Have you and your child worked out a plan for a safe, productive and happy summer? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you arranged** for your child to be supervised? Will an adult know what your child is doing at all times?
2. **Have you agreed** with your child on a set of rules for the summer?
3. **Have you established** summer learning goals for your child, such as reading every day for 30 minutes?
4. **Does your child have** an exercise plan for the summer?
5. **Have you committed** to spending time with your child

each day—sharing a meal, exercising, or talking as you run errands together?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you and your child have a head start on a healthy summer. For each *no*, try that idea.

"The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook."
—William James

Family time builds bonds

Take advantage of summer to spend more time with your child. Experts say that kids who spend quality time with their parents tend to perform better academically. You might:



- **Have a weekly family night.** Turn off the TV. Cook a meal together, talk and play board games.
- **Ask for your child's opinion** on current events. Listen to her ideas.
- **Participate in family traditions.** If you always go to the same park to watch fireworks, keep doing it. No traditions? Brainstorm with your child and start some.

Source: T. McMahon, *Teen Tips*, Gallery Books.

Discipline the positive way

By middle school, your child has probably learned to tune out negative discipline, such as yelling. So, use positive discipline whenever possible. This involves:

- **Noticing** what your child does right. Give him specific compliments.
- **Trusting your child.** Give him a new freedom when he has shown responsibility.

Source: J. Thompson, *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher*, Jossey-Bass.

Turn bored into busy

Bored middle schoolers with too much time on their hands are at risk for getting into trouble. To keep your child busy and learning this summer:

- **Consider a summer job.** Pet care, babysitting or helping a neighbor with yard work are good ways for your child to earn money and learn responsibility.
- **Start a book club.** Let your child pick a book. Read it together and set a date to discuss it. Let her invite some friends.
- **Give her a research project,** such as finding the best price for a small appliance.

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