

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



November 2010

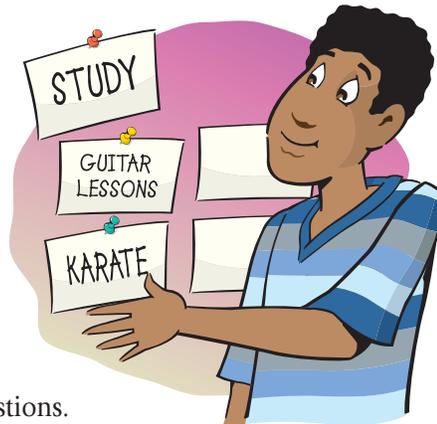
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Educational Service Unit 10

School is your child's first priority

Extracurricular activities should not interfere with schoolwork. If your busy middle schooler's after-school activities are hurting his in-school performance, it's time to free up his calendar. To determine if his after-school schedule is too full, ask yourself:

- **Are** weekday afternoons filled with sports or clubs?
- **Does** he not have enough time to finish homework?
- **Is** he often tired, stressed or irritable?
- **Are** his grades slipping?
- **Does** he have time to read or hang out with the family?



Your child may be over-scheduled if you answered *yes* to most of these questions. He might need to cut out some activities. Here's how you can help:

- **Take a hard look at his activities.** If he plays more than one sport, consider enforcing a "one sport per semester" rule.
- **Understand the time commitment.** Your child needs to have enough time for schoolwork.
- **Prioritize.** It's great that your child enjoys karate, guitar lessons and babysitting. But if they leave him with no time to study, something's got to give. Talk to him about which activity he most enjoys. It'll be hard, but he should consider taking a break from the others.



Respectful discipline gets results

How can you teach your middle schooler to respect you? Respect is a two-way street, so be respectful to your child when disciplining her. Show her that you take things like house rules seriously, and that you're committed to enforcing those rules. Always be:

- **Consistent.** Once you make the rules, stick to them. If it isn't okay for your child to break curfew tonight, it shouldn't be tomorrow or next weekend, either.
- **Reasonable.** Resist the urge to threaten her with an outrageous punishment (such as grounding her for a year). Don't use major punishments for minor mistakes.
- **Clear.** Let your child know *exactly* what's expected of him—from how much TV she can watch to how clean her room should be.
- **Tactful.** When your child misbehaves, correct her in private, not in front of her friends.

Don't praise with 'but ...'

Encouraging children with praise is a good idea. Yet it's less effective when compliments are followed with a push to do better. "I'm proud that you got a B ... but if you worked a little harder, you could probably get an A." The single word "but" hurts the praise. Your child might even forget that you said something nice. The solution is to give praise and leave it at that. If you want to urge your child to improve, do it at another time.

Source: J. Delisle, "Reversal of Fortune: How Parents Unintentionally Undermine a Gifted Child's Self-Worth," National Association for Gifted Children, www.nagc.org.

Share these memory tricks

Help your middle schooler remember the things she studies. To boost her memory:

- **Add music.** Help your child make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Go mental.** Get your child to associate what she's trying to memorize with a mental image. A picture really is worth a thousand words (or facts).
- **Make it personal.** Ask your child to explain the topic she's studying to you. Just putting it into her own words may help the concepts stick in her mind.



Kids can read beyond books

To encourage reading, it's important to let your child read what he wants. Keep in mind that some kids do not like traditional fiction. Let your child read comic books, books about magic tricks, cookbooks, graphic novels, books about a favorite athlete —*anything* that gets your child reading!





How can parents teach kids to be fiscally responsible?

Q: My seventh grader gets an allowance, but she always wants extra cash to go shopping, buy snacks, etc. How do I teach her the value of a dollar?

A: There's no avoiding it: Research shows that kids aged 12 to 19 spend over \$170 billion of their own and/or their parents' money each year. Here are some ways to help your child deal with money responsibly:

- **Talk about needs vs. wants.** Show her that even adults have to make hard choices about where to spend money. "It would be great to buy a new TV, but the washer just broke. We need to fix that instead."
- **Talk about advertising.** Commercials are flashy for a reason: They want kids to buy their products. So help your child understand that they're purposely trying to lure her in. It may keep her from falling for their gimmicks.
- **Talk about budgeting.** Give your child a set amount of money for new clothes. If she'd like to buy the latest fashions, have her search online or in catalogs for the best prices. It might help her learn to be thrifter!



Encourage smart decisions

Now that he's in middle school, your child is making more decisions on his own. It's essential to discuss some important topics with him so that he'll be able to make smart choices now and in the future. Discuss:

- **School.** Does he take his work seriously? Or does he do the bare minimum?
- **Friends.** Does he have good friends? How does he feel about peer pressure?
- **Drinking and drugs.** Does he understand what he risks by experimenting with these substances?

Source: Sean Covey, "The 6 Most Important Decisions Your Teen Will Ever Make," Education.com, www.education.com/magazine/article/Ed_6_Most_Important.

College facts can inspire

You've heard the saying "where there's a will, there's a way." That works for going to college, too! To build your child's will, tell her that going to college will help her:

- **Get** a better job.
- **Earn** more money.
- **Learn** fascinating, useful information.

Source: *Think College? Me? Now?* U.S. Department of Education, www2.ed.gov/pubs/CollegeMeNow/index.html.



Do you use consequences effectively?

Consequences are the cornerstone of discipline and, in fact, of everyday life. All the things people do (causes) have consequences (effects). Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are using consequences properly:

1. **Do you give** consequences in a timely fashion—no more than a day later?
2. **Do you make sure** the consequence fits the action? Example: If your child doesn't take out the trash, he has to do a different chore later.
3. **Does your child** understand each consequence? Example: You explain to him that he has to spend part of his afternoon doing one of your chores to make up for the time you lost taking out the trash for him.
4. **Does your child** understand the difference between a *consequence* and *punishment*? Consequences are the results of his own actions.
5. **Do you let** your child decide if he wants to change his behavior or risk repeating the consequence?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are giving meaningful consequences. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are."
—Roy Disney

Show how to learn online

The Internet should be more than a place where your child chats with friends and logs on to social networking sites. It can also be an excellent learning tool. Just remember to:

- **Supervise** your child. Keep the computer in a family area, rather than a bedroom.
- **Know** who publishes websites. Websites that end with *.gov* or *.edu* tend to have the most reliable information.



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: Erika Beasley. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021