

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



November 2014

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Set the achievement bar high and your child is likely to reach it

Do you want your child to succeed in middle school? Let her know your goals for her are ambitious and you believe she will reach them. Research shows kids whose parents expect them to achieve generally do just that.

The key, however, is to make sure your expectations aren't so high that your child can't succeed. They should be just challenging enough to be difficult but still attainable—assuming she works hard.

When setting expectations, remember to:

- **Be clear.** Avoid vague comments about goals. Instead of saying "I want you to do better this semester," be specific and say, "I want you to focus on bringing your math grade up five points this semester." A concrete goal is achievable; a fuzzy objective isn't.
- **Think of the future, but focus on the present.** It's fine to dream about her earning a full scholarship to college. But that dream—even if it comes true—won't materialize for years. In the meantime, your child's book report is due Thursday. So a reminder to reread chapter three may be more useful to her than another mention of college entry competition.
- **Tolerate setbacks.** Kids learn as much from failure as from success, so don't "save" her from falling short. Anytime she fails to reach a goal, be there for her. Remind her you love her. Then get right back to expecting great things from her!

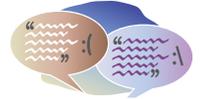
Source: W. Parker, "Setting Appropriately High Expectations for Children," [niswc.com/bar](http://niswc.com/bar).



## For the sake of argument

Your child is becoming a more skilled thinker. She can think abstractly and form new ideas on the spot. And boy, can she argue.

Arguments can be tiresome, but be patient. Your child's mental skills are improving, and her arguments show it. Be open to her ideas, but remember that you are the adult.



## Learning continues at home

All parents have valuable contributions to make to support their children's academic success. Try these ideas with your child:

- **Read to each other.** Talk about what you read.
- **Give him new responsibilities.**
- **Talk about things** he's learning in school, and what he thinks about them.
- **Spend time together.**
- **Ask him to think critically.** Discuss similarities and differences. Ask his advice when you are solving a problem. Ask "What if?" questions.



## At risk: victims and bullies

In addition to a long list of student problems caused by bullying, studies have found that both the bullying victim and the bully are at greater risk for substance abuse. It's wise to monitor your child's:

- **Moods.** If you see a negative personality change that lasts more than a few days, talk to your child about what's wrong. If she won't talk, alert a school counselor.
- **Computer and cell phone use.**
- **Connection to you.** Assure her that you care and will not stand by and let her be hurt. Nor will you risk her health.

Source: "Bullying in Middle School May Lead to Increased Substance Abuse in High School," *Science Daily*, [niswc.com/substance](http://niswc.com/substance).



## To manage projects, divide and conquer

Many middle schoolers are still getting used to the amount of homework they have. When they have to fit in a long-term project as well, they can be overwhelmed. To help manage assignment demands, encourage your child to:

- **Divide the project** into about five steps (fewer if it's small, more if it's a very large one).
- **Make the steps specific.** "Find 10 facts that support your topic. Note the source for each fact," is better than "Find a website on your topic."
- **Assign a deadline** for each step. This is key. Having several small deadlines keeps the project fresh in your child's mind. It also keeps him on track to complete it.
- **Schedule** how long he will spend working on the project each night.
- **Give himself a small reward,** such as a little screen time, when he completes a step.

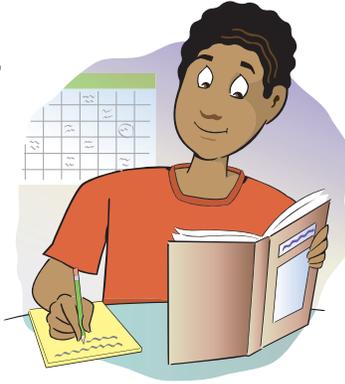
Source: A.K. Dolin, *Homework Made Simple: Tips, Tools and Solutions for Stress-Free Homework*, Advantage Books.



## How do I reinforce my child's efforts to make a new start?

**Q:** My eighth grader got off to a rough start this school year, but he seems to be getting his act together now. I want to be sure he has good habits before high school. How can I keep him on track without pushing too hard?

**A:** Congratulations on knowing how important it is to pull back sometimes. Although you want your child to continue down this positive path, you don't want to "micromanage" him. To support—and not undermine—his improved habits:



- **Applaud his efforts.** Tell your child how proud you are of the changes he's made. "I think it's terrific that you're working so hard to turn your assignments in on time." He may act like it's no big deal, but your approval likely means the world to him.
- **Avoid backhanded compliments.** When you're congratulating him on doing better, don't bring up his past habits. He already knows he made mistakes; there's no reason to remind him of them.
- **Help behind the scenes.** Pay attention to your child's positive study routines and subtly support them. If he now hits the books before dinner, bring him a healthy snack while he's studying. If he's finally using his desk, be sure his lamp is bright and his pencil cup is stocked. If he's planning his time better, get him a big calendar to help him keep track.



## How are you coping with adolescence?

Adolescence is a time of rapid development in children. Are you prepared to guide your child through these changes? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you understand** that your child needs to begin to separate from you?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you accept** that your child may be moodier now than in previous years? This is no reason, however, to tolerate rudeness or disrespect.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you respect** your child's privacy, while staying aware of her friendships and activities?
- \_\_\_ **4. Are you firm,** fair and consistent in explaining and enforcing your family's rules and values to your child, even as she tests her limits?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to think about her future and set goals, while realizing she is more focused on today?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child navigate the middle school years well. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Probably the best way to describe adolescence is to say that it begins at puberty and ends ... sometime."*

*—David Walsh, Ph.D.*

## Inspire a desire to achieve

Keeping a middle schooler motivated isn't always easy. But don't let him get worn down by the daily grind. To inspire your child to give his best efforts:

- **Help him set his own goals.** "Read for pleasure every weekend." "Study science facts three nights each week." The more reachable the goals, the more chances he'll have to feel successful.
- **Provide perspective.** If he is upset over a poor grade, remind him that a few bad marks won't derail his entire future.
- **Offer a bonus for success.** Good grades are their own reward, but everyone appreciates a treat now and then!

## Be honest about integrity

Instill a sense of integrity in your child and she'll work hard in school and become an ethical adult. To nurture her integrity:

- **Discuss it.** One survey reported that 60% of students admitted to cheating. If your child doesn't think it's a big deal, ask why. Tell her that cheating is never okay.
- **Be a model** of integrity yourself. Your child is always watching—and learning.

## Solve a math problem

Some students find middle school math challenging. Encourage your child to:

- **Make good use** of class time. Write down two examples of each type of problem presented.
- **Review class notes at home daily.**
- **Look to the textbook** for sample problems and explanations.
- **Ask for help.** Your child must do his own homework, but he can ask a friend to demonstrate a concept.



Source: "Homework Help for Middle School Math," Math and Reading Help, [niswc.com/solve](http://niswc.com/solve).

### Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Phillip Wherry.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1021