

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



November 2015

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

Set expectations and show your child how to meet them

Setting expectations for your middle schooler can motivate him to give his best efforts at school, develop his sense of responsibility and build a strong family connection. It's critical though, to make your expectations clear and achievable.

Here are some examples of appropriate expectations and specific ways to express them to your child:

- **Put schoolwork first.** "You're free to watch TV, play video games or talk to friends *after* you've finished your homework, not before."
- **Disagree respectfully.** "I expect you to speak respectfully to me and to your teachers, even when you are upset."
- **Limit social media.** "You can check Instagram and text friends for up to an hour each night. But electronic devices get turned off at 9 p.m."
- **Keep you posted about plans.** "Please let me know ahead of time if you want to go somewhere. Try not to surprise me at the last minute."
- **Participate in family events.** "You may plan weekend activities, but remember, we go see Grandpa on Sundays, and you need to be there."
- **Take care of himself and his things.** "Put your dirty laundry in the hamper. Any clothes left on your bedroom floor won't get washed."

Source: R. Burke, Ph.D. and others, *Common Sense Parenting: Using Your Head as Well as Your Heart to Raise School-Aged Children*, Boys Town Press.



Six ways you can help with homework

Watching a child struggle with homework is so difficult for some parents that they jump in and do the assignment for their child. But homework is the student's responsibility. To help a struggler without taking over:

1. **Help your child organize.** Encourage her to use calendars, assignment notebooks and folders to keep things straight.
2. **Help her plan ahead.** Teach your child to divide large projects into small parts and to schedule plenty of time to do each part.
3. **Study with her.** Quiz her on vocabulary words, history facts or science flash cards.
4. **Offer tips,** such as "Reread the instructions carefully."
5. **Ask questions.** Help your child figure things out by asking, "Is there any part of this you *can* do?" "Is there a sample problem or question like this in your textbook?" "Is this like anything else you've done before?"
6. **Have your child ask** the teacher for help if she is still confused.

Take care of the basics

Your family's habits have an impact on your child's readiness to learn in school. To support his success, commit to these routines:

- **Meals.** Serve lean proteins and lots of produce. Be sure your child eats breakfast.
- **Exercise.** Encourage at least 30 minutes per day. Exercise together when you can.
- **Sleep.** Set a bedtime that allows your child to get nine to 10 hours of sleep.

Learn what tests can teach

Your child may think that when a test is over, so is its importance to her. Remind her that tests offer her many ways to learn. She'll get the most out of a test if she:



- **Jots down thoughts** after taking it. What was difficult? What did she feel confident about?
- **Keeps it** after she gets it back. She can correct wrong answers and use the test as a study aid for finals.
- **Analyzes errors.** Were they careless, or due to lack of knowledge? She can think of ways to study more effectively, such as using flash cards or making a study guide.

Your child benefits from helping others

Studies show that performing community service can lead to better grades and more interest in school. Volunteering can:



- **Build your child's self-esteem** and connection to the community.
- **Decrease the chances** of your child taking negative risks, such as using drugs.
- **Teach your child valuable skills,** such as how to work with different kinds of people.

Source: J. Littlefield, "How to Promote a Positive Teen Volunteer Experience," About Parenting, niscw.com/volunteer.



How can I make writing less agonizing for my child?

Q: My daughter hates to write. Whenever she has a writing assignment, she just stares at the blank piece of paper. Is there anything I can do to help?

A: Middle schoolers are often reluctant writers. Many simply freeze with fear at the thought of writing. They fear that what they write won't be any good, or that they'll be made fun of.

To help your child write more easily:

- **Remind her** that professional writers have difficulty writing sometimes, too.
- **Talk through ideas** with her. Encourage your child to write down her ideas just as they come. Later, she can correct grammar and flow.
- **Have her try free-writing.** She should write anything that comes to mind, no matter how silly.
- **Don't overcriticize.** If she asks you to review her writing, note what you like first. Focus on what your child is trying to say, not just the mechanics of writing.
- **Don't fix her mistakes** for her. You'll send the message that you don't think your child is capable.
- **Be patient.** Allow her to express her frustration. It takes time to become a good writer.



Can your child say 'no' to peer pressure?

Middle schoolers care a lot about what their friends say and think. Are you preparing your child to recognize and cope with negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** to your child about the desire to fit in?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** doing the right thing rather than the easy thing?
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** ways your child can say *no* to things he knows are wrong? He could say, "I'm not interested," and walk away.
- ___ **4. Do you make** your family rules clear to your child? Do you also let him know he can talk to you if he feels pressured to break them?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to think about the consequences of his actions?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're helping your child resist negative peer pressure. For each no answer, try that idea.

"When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically."
—National Education Association

Handle a poor report card

If your child brings home a disappointing report card, keep in mind that reacting with frustration and anger won't help her earn better grades. Instead, try to:

- 1. Put grades in perspective.** They are important, but they're not a measure of your child's worth.
- 2. Talk about things** she's done well. Ask what she's most proud of.
- 3. Ask your child** what she thinks is the problem behind the bad grades.
- 4. Set realistic goals** for improvement. Don't ask for all A's if she's getting all C's.
- 5. Contact the teachers** to learn their views on the situation.

Ask your child for a lesson

If you are wondering how you can help your child learn material that you may not know yourself, try asking him to teach it to you. When your child shares knowledge:

- **His interest increases.** A parent's interest builds a child's interest.
- **He reinforces his own learning.**

Feed a family connection

Eating meals as a family isn't easy when everyone is busy. But kids who eat dinner with their families four or more nights a week have an advantage in school. To connect with your child over meals:



- **Be flexible.** If you can't eat dinner together, share breakfast instead.
- **Include your child** in the conversation. Ask questions like "What's one surprising thing that happened in school today?"
- **Go low-tech.** Turn off phones and TV.

Source: "Family Meals Spell S-U-C-C-E-S-S," Purdue University Center for Families' Promoting Family Meals Project, niscw.com/meals.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

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