

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



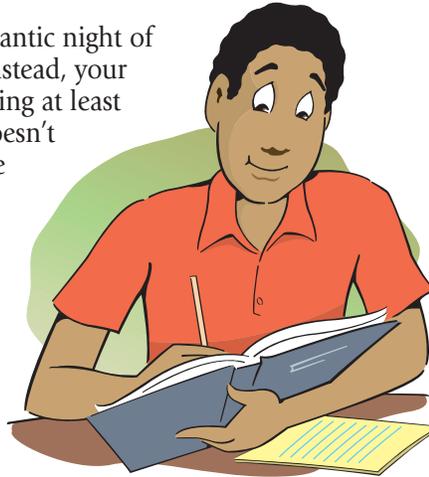
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## Preparation leads to test success

Does the thought of an upcoming test give your middle schooler sweaty palms and a stomachache? Help him prepare for the big event and he may be less nervous about it. Here's how:

- **Remind him not to cram.** One frantic night of studying won't pay off on test day. Instead, your middle schooler should begin preparing at least a week in advance. That way, if he doesn't understand something, he'll still have time to get help before the test.
- **Make good use of the textbook and class notes.** Are there practice tests in your child's book? Encourage him to take them as he prepares for the big exam. If there aren't any, see if he can create a practice quiz by using his notes from class.
- **Have him ask for clarification.** If your child is unsure of what's going to be on the test, suggest that he ask his teacher to clarify. Few things are scarier than the unknown, so the more information he has, the more confident he may feel.
- **Help him take care of himself.** You can't take your child's test for him, but you can make sure he's rested and fed on exam day. Be sure he gets enough sleep the night before and offer him a healthful breakfast that morning. And encourage your child to pack his backpack with materials needed for the test: pencils, pens, a calculator, extra paper, etc.



Source: "Preparing for a Math Test," Mission College, [http://salsa.missioncollege.org/mss/stories/storyReader\\$29](http://salsa.missioncollege.org/mss/stories/storyReader$29).



## Students who read more learn more

The best readers are often the best learners. The more your child reads, even if she isn't reading what you think she "should" read, the better off she'll be.

To motivate your child to read:

- **Issue a challenge.** Studies show that reading at least four books over a three-month period is particularly helpful. Challenge your child to read four books by 2012. Offer an incentive, such as adding a privilege.
- **Ask questions** about what she is reading. Some books include discussion questions.
- **Ask the school** or community librarian to recommend books based on your child's interests and reading level.
- **Take advantage** of favorite movies. Many are based on books.

Source: H. Trierweiler, "Sunscreen ... Shade ... Books! How to help kids discover the joy of summer reading," *Instructor*, May/June 2009, Scholastic.

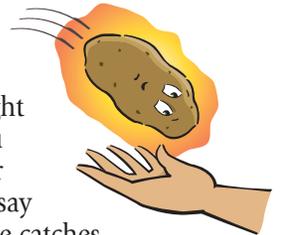
## Get ready for conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are often brief. To get the most out of the time you spend with your child's teachers, plan ahead. Ask your child if she has any concerns about a specific class. Make a list of topics you'd like to cover. And remember, you and your child's teachers have the same goal: to do what's best for your child.

## Games review math facts

Knowing basic math facts makes learning advanced math a lot easier. But most middle schoolers won't appreciate being drilled on those facts. Instead, try these fun activities:

- **Hot Potato.** Call out a problem ("eight times eight") as you throw a ball to your child. See if he can say the answer before he catches the ball.
- **Multiplication Duel.** Remove the face cards from a card deck. Each player turns over one card. The player who first says the product of the cards wins them. The player who ends up with all of the cards in the deck wins.



## Schedule weekly 'dates'

Friends are very important to middle schoolers, but your child still values time with you. Sit down with your child and work out a time that you will be together. One week, let your child pick the activity. The next week, you pick it.

Be creative when thinking of activities you can do together. Remember, it's about spending time, not money.

Source: M. Radencich and J. Schumm, *How to Help Your Child With Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing Inc.





## When are children mature enough to have cell phones?

**Q:** Now that my daughter is in middle school, she says “everyone” has a cell phone. I don’t usually go along with what “everyone” is doing—but I want my daughter to be able to communicate with her friends. What should I do?

**A:** Be aware that having a phone is a serious responsibility both on and off school property. To decide if your daughter is mature enough to handle this responsibility, think about:



- **Following school rules.** Learn the policy. Spell out for your daughter the consequences of not following it. And let her know that if her cell phone use affects her schoolwork, you *will* take it away.
- **Money.** Cell phone use can be expensive. For middle and high school students, most of the expense comes from sending and receiving text messages. Some students have thousands of texts a month. Who will pay for the use of the phone? Will your child have unlimited text messaging? Decide *before* getting your daughter a phone.
- **Danger.** Sending a threatening message or text on a phone can get your child in trouble at school for bullying. That’s true even if she sent the message in a fit of anger and didn’t mean it. Another danger zone: the camera feature on most phones. Forbid your child to send or receive any photo that could be taken as threatening or sexually suggestive.



## Is your child involved after school?

Research shows that students who participate with their schools beyond the academic day do better in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are encouraging your child to connect to middle school:

1. **Have you reviewed** the list of school activities and clubs with your child so you’re both aware of everything available?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to participate in an activity that matches his interests?
3. **Are you enthusiastic** if your child expresses interest in trying a new activity? Middle school is a time of exploration.
4. **Do you encourage** your child to attend activities such as school sporting events or dances, and help him find a way to get there and home?
5. **Do you urge** your child to take advantage of time with teachers after school to help his grades and feelings of connection?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you are helping your child feel connected to school. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

“There are many wonderful things that will never be done if you do not do them.”

—Charles D. Gill

## Use positive peer pressure

Peer pressure can cause otherwise good kids to do bad things, such as skip school, use alcohol and drugs, etc. But there’s *positive* peer pressure, too! It encourages kids to:

- **Work** hard in school.
- **Try** new healthful activities.
- **Behave** respectfully toward others.

Steer your child towards making friends with students who share your family’s values.

Source: S. Schifferdecker, “Harnessing the Power of Positive Peer Pressure,” More4Kids.info, [www.more4kids.info/611/positive-peer-pressure](http://www.more4kids.info/611/positive-peer-pressure).

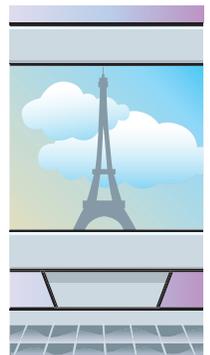
## Avoid giving ‘wiggle room’

Setting clear expectations is still the best way to discipline your middle schooler. Anything less will allow him too much “wiggle room”—which he will use!

Lay out your expectations in clear terms. “You’d better do your homework” doesn’t work as well as “I expect you to start your homework as soon as you finish your snack.”

## Your interest reinforces what your child is learning

Children are more likely to focus on their studies when their parents take an interest in what they’re learning. So ask your child to talk about what’s happening in class and then show some interest in what you hear. Is she reading about the Civil War in social studies? Mention how cool it would be to tour a battlefield. Is she studying French? Search online for images of the Eiffel Tower. The great thing about enthusiasm is that it’s contagious! So spread some to your child today.



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