

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

## Where kindness leads, respect will follow

Without respect between students and school staff, middle school would be a pretty chaotic place. The key to respectful behavior is treating others as you would like to be treated. It begins with kindness.

Encourage your child to:

- **Speak kindly.** Respectful language doesn't include profanity or other hurtful words. Respectful speakers don't interrupt. They use words such as *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me*. Set an example for your child by speaking kindly and respectfully to him. Praise him for using respectful language, and correct him when he doesn't.
- **Do the right thing.** This involves treating both people and property with respect. It means leaving things better than you found them. Remind your child to look for opportunities to do the right thing: "If you see paper on the classroom floor, pick it up. If someone has her hands full and is trying to leave the room, open the door for her."
- **Practice empathy.** This means putting yourself in someone else's shoes in order to understand their feelings or motivations. For example, a student with empathy for his teacher understands that the teacher enforces rules to create an environment for learning—not just to "be mean." Ask your child often, "How do you think that person feels?" or, "What could be going on to make that person act that way?"



Source: N. Paulu, "Helping your child through early adolescence," U.S. Department of Education, [nswc.com/kind](http://nswc.com/kind).



## Four things teachers want you to do

It's still early in the school year. You may not have met your child's teachers yet. But here are some things many teachers would like to tell all parents:

1. **Please be involved** with your child's schooling. Teachers can't make your child do her homework or study for tests. Many students are self-motivated, but many others are not! If yours isn't, set study hours. Oversee your child's work—but never do it for her.
2. **Please emphasize** to your child how important it is to turn in work. Work that is never turned

in may earn a zero. And just one zero can really drag down your child's grade.

3. **Please make sure** your child comes to school unless she is sick or there is an emergency. Chronic absences will hurt her even more than that zero will.

4. **Please tell** your child's teachers if she is struggling with something.

Source: R. Taibbi, "What Teachers Wish Parents Knew," *Psychology Today*, [nswc.com/four](http://nswc.com/four).

## Think before you post

Social media is a part of life for many students. Parents play an important role in keeping it safe. Teach your child this important rule of thumb:



**If you aren't comfortable with everyone knowing it, don't post it.**

## Help out with fitting in

Not all school challenges are academic. There's a social component, too. Much of it centers on fitting in. To help, you can:

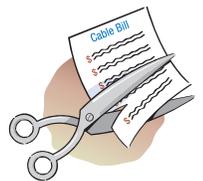
- **Acknowledge your child's concerns** about fitting in. Don't say it "doesn't matter." It *does* matter, especially to him.
- **Urge him to be patient.** Explain that finding his niche can take time.
- **Point out his strengths**, and the fact that others may also appreciate them. "You're a great painter. I bet you'll meet kids in art class who like to paint, too!"
- **Work together on his social skills.**

Source: "Fitting In," *DiscoveryEducation.com*, [nswc.com/fit-in](http://nswc.com/fit-in).

## Engage your child's brain

Your child's body is developing. Her ability to think like an adult is too. Boost her thinking skills by asking questions like:

- **Why are your favorite things** your favorites? What are some of the characteristics that make you like them?
- **How can our family** save money? Could we cut out something without hurting the family? What should we do with the money we save?
- **Where do you wish we could go?** Why? Have her do some research to find information that supports her choice.



Source: "Parents' Guide to Student Success," National PTA, [nswc.com/favorites](http://nswc.com/favorites).



## How can I keep my divorce from hurting my child?

**Q:** My husband and I are splitting up, and it's taking a toll on our sixth grader. Her grades are dropping, and she's starting to act out in school. What can I do?

**A:** Separation and divorce can be devastating for families. So the first thing to do is to acknowledge your child's pain. Never forget that what you're going through isn't just happening to you. It's happening to her, too.

To help your child keep her bearings during this tough time:

- **Tell her that you love her.** Don't let your child's feelings get lost in the shuffle. Remind her that you'll always be there for her.
- **Assure her that it's not her fault.** Kids often feel responsible for their parents' happiness. Reassure her that the separation has nothing to do with her.
- **Spare her the details.** She's your child—not your sounding board.
- **Don't force her to choose sides.** Your child will likely do better—both in school and in life—if she feels loved by and connected to *both* her parents.
- **Tell the school**—your child's teachers, her guidance counselor—what's going on so the staff will have a better understanding of your child.



## Is your child managing middle school?

These are years of rapid change for many students. They take more classes and face greater demands than they did in elementary school. Are you helping your child make the adjustment? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** with your child about how well he is managing the physical aspects of the school, such as classrooms, hallways and his locker?
- \_\_\_ **2. Are you aware** of your child's study habits?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you know** how your child feels about his teachers? Do you discuss teacher expectations for each class?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you keep an eye** on your child's social life?
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you talked** to your child about peer pressure, and

your family's values about drugs and alcohol?

### How well are you doing?

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

“Adolescence is a stage in life during which it is crucial for children to begin to develop their own identity.”

—Brad E. Sachs, Ph.D.

## School counselors help your child stay on track

Your child's guidance counselor is a fantastic resource. Thanks to specialized training, guidance counselors can help your child:

- **Set and meet goals.** The counselor can help your child define what he hopes to achieve, then steer him toward classes and activities to meet those goals.
- **Resolve conflicts.** If your child is struggling with something—academic or social—his counselor can guide him.
- **Get extra support.** The counselor can help find any outside resources your child needs to thrive in middle school.

Source: “The Role of the Professional School Counselor,” American School Counselor Association, [niswc.com/guide](http://niswc.com/guide).

## Spend time doing something new



Spending time with your child builds the critical connection between you that supports her efforts in school. To expand the experience, instead of doing one of *her* activities or one of *your* activities, try one that's new to both of you. It's a wonderful way to see a different side of your child.

## Relieve test anxiety

Does your child come unglued at the thought of a big test? Encourage him to:

- **Ask the teacher for details.** What is the format? How much will his score count toward his final grade?
- **Ask about study aids.** Are there old tests he can take? Websites he can visit?
- **Remember that one test** will not derail his future.
- **Get a good night's sleep** and eat a good breakfast before the test.

Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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