

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



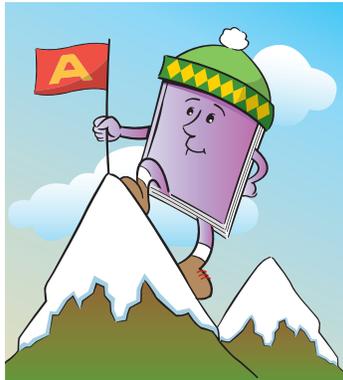
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When you make reading appealing, reading skills climb

Reading is a critical skill for success in nearly every subject your child will study in school. And research shows that students who read a lot become better readers. To encourage your child to read more at home:

- **Make time for reading.** Put reading into your family's schedule every day.
- **Read aloud.** Take turns reading chapters to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- **Set an example.** Show your child that reading is fun by reading for pleasure yourself.
- **Keep reading materials handy.** Fill your house with magazines, books, newspapers and other interesting things to read.
- **Look for books that appeal** to your child. Encourage her to read more about her interests. Make regular trips to the library or bookstore. Ask the librarian to recommend books for kids your child's age.
- **Set limits on technology time,** unless your child is reading an e-book. Without TV and computer games, she will probably find that there is more time for reading than she thought!
- **Don't insist she finish** books she's not enjoying. Free-time reading should always be a pleasure.
- **Discuss books.** Tell your child about a book you enjoyed, and ask her to tell you about one of her favorites.



Sleepy students can't learn

It's tough for kids to focus in school when they're tired. Does your child rise easily in the morning? Is she alert all day? If not:



- **Stick to** a reasonable bedtime.
- **Eliminate** caffeine intake.
- **Turn off** electronics an hour before bed.

Source: K. Boyse, R.N., "Sleep Problems," University of Michigan Health System, niswc.com/moresleep.

Your child can do math

As students progress through school, math concepts become more abstract. Kids who haven't mastered basic concepts yet may struggle and become anxious. To keep anxiety from derailing math learning:

- **Hear your child out.** Listen carefully, then say, "This is challenging, but I know you can get it."
- **Ask questions.** Exactly which part is confusing? Are there parts he does get?
- **Make the teacher an ally.** Urge your child to ask the teacher about confusing concepts. If needed, ask the teacher how you and she can help your child.

Source: J.R. Jacobson, *How Is My Sixth Grader Doing in School? What to Expect and How to Help*, Fireside.



Five steps turn problems into solutions

Your middle schooler is probably ready to begin solving problems for himself. To guide his decision-making efforts, give him this five-step plan:

1. **Define the problem.** What exactly is the nature of the issue or choice your child faces? encourage your child to weigh the pros and cons of each, and select a solution.
2. **Brainstorm solutions.** Once he has defined the problem, your child can list possible solutions. He shouldn't get bogged down in analyzing each idea—he should simply list every idea that he can think of.
3. **Evaluate options.** Now that he has several potential solutions,
4. **Take action.** It's time to devise a plan to put his solution into motion. Let him follow his plan by himself, but offer guidance if he's unsure how to proceed.
5. **Reassess.** Is his plan helping him solve the problem? If yes, wonderful! If not, he can go back to step 3 and try another solution.

Forge positive connections

Your child is learning her place in school and in the outside world. To foster her sense of citizenship, suggest that she:

- **Volunteer.** Your child might conduct a neighborhood drive to collect soap and other supplies for a shelter.
- **Protect the environment.** Can she think of ways your family can conserve? Put her in charge of these efforts.
- **Make her voice heard.** She can write to an elected official to share her views.



Source: B.A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, Free Spirit Publishing.



How can I help my child get along with the teacher?

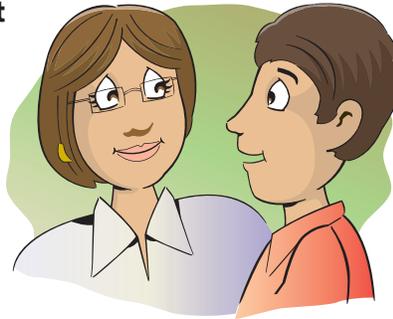
Q: Last year, my son seemed to get off on the wrong foot with one of his teachers. How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?

A: Teachers try to be fair to all students. But there are a number of things your child can do to make a good impression. In addition to being well mannered, your child should show an interest in learning.

Start by reviewing basic manners with your son—such as saying *please*, *thank you*, *excuse me* and *I'm sorry*. Then, encourage him to:

- **Arrive prepared**, with pencils, books and other needed supplies.
- **Listen attentively** and look at the teacher as she speaks. He should avoid engaging in side conversations.
- **Participate in class** and ask questions that show interest in the subject.
- **Turn in assignments on time.**
- **Raise problems one-on-one** with the teacher—not in front of the entire class.

You can help by talking with your son about school every day. If you suspect there is a problem, suggest that he talk with the teacher. If needed, contact the teacher yourself or ask for a parent-teacher-student meeting. The more she knows about your child, the more the teacher can help.



How do you handle your child's stress?

Many students find navigating middle school stressful. That stress can result in poor academic performance if it isn't addressed. Are you helping your child overcome stress or anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to let you know if she is feeling worried or uncertain?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your child use a calendar or planner to keep track of her assignments?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to participate in sports or to get regular exercise?
- ___ **4. Do you make sure** your child gets enough sleep and eats nutritious food?
- ___ **5. Do you stay in touch** with your child's teachers about how she is doing in school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are actively working to keep your child's stress level low. For each no answer, try that idea.

“Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

—Thomas Edison

Plan ahead for study success

Students who study haphazardly rob themselves of the chance to do their best in school. Help your child create an effective study plan. He should include:

- **When** to study. Help him pick a time when he is most alert.
- **Where** to study. A study spot should be distraction-free. If this isn't possible at home, have him try the library.
- **Which** methods work for him. Some kids read and take notes. Others have parents quiz them. Help your child figure out what helps him retain information.

Source: R. Fry, *Ace Any Test*, Career Press.

Teach the power of attitude

One of the key lessons middle schoolers are learning is that their attitude toward education matters, and they can control it.

Discuss this responsibility with your child. If things are going wrong, help her see how her attitude may have contributed to the situation. Show her how word choice, tone and body language can influence the way things turn out.

Get a jump on the future

Your child may not know what he wants to do for the rest of his life. Keeping a journal now can help him begin to figure it out. Ask your child to write down his thoughts about these questions:



- **What are my strengths** and weaknesses in school?
- **What do I like** to learn about?
- **Do I prefer** to work with others or alone?
- **What is important** to me?

Have him update the journal every few months. Look for trends that can provide clues to your child's future success.

Source: M.S. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

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