

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



September 2010

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Connect home & school this year

Experts say that students perform best when their parents are involved with school and communicate with teachers. To make sure your involvement is effective, stay connected! Be sure to:

- **Meet the teachers.** The beginning of the school year is a perfect time to introduce yourself to your child's teachers. Talk about your goals for the upcoming year. If problems crop up later, you won't be going in to discuss them with a stranger.
- **Get involved** in school-related organizations like the parent group. Not only will it benefit your child's school, it may give you a chance to work with some of his teachers outside of the classroom.
- **Volunteer.** You don't need to spend long hours in the classroom to make an impact. Just pitch in when you can. Ask your child's teachers for suggestions of how your help can be needed both in and out of the classroom.
- **Attend parent-teacher conferences.** These sessions are critical for keeping tabs on your child's progress, so don't miss them.



Source: "Helping Children Succeed in School: Parent-Teacher Communication," University of Illinois Extension, [www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/09-communication.html](http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/09-communication.html).



## School success starts with organization

Middle schoolers can have a hard time staying organized. But organization is a big part of school success. While it's ultimately your child's responsibility to organize her schoolwork, there are ways you can help. You can:

- **Make sure** she has the right stuff. Your child should have separate notebooks, binders or folders for each class—and a supply of index cards and self-stick notes.
- **Keep** a hole-punch handy. Have your child punch holes in any handouts, etc., so she can add them to the correct binder.
- **Have** her use a large calendar to write in due dates for long-term assignments.
- **Provide** a daily planner. Your child can use it to keep track of assignments, projects and tests.
- **Check** that her study spot is stocked with necessary tools at hand.

Source: Alan Finder, "Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success," The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/2008/01/01/education/01boys.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/01/education/01boys.html).

## To learn in school, your child must be in school

The first step toward success in the middle grades is regular attendance. When your child misses school, she might be able to make up the work—but she can't:

- **Participate** in class discussions.
- **Listen** to explanations.

Catching up is more difficult in middle school. Send your child to school unless she is ill or there is a family emergency.

## Make reading a priority

Nothing will help your child at school more than reading. It's the cornerstone of every subject—so be sure to promote it! You can:

- **Put it on the schedule.** Block off a half hour for family reading.
- **Get your child a library card.** Visit the library often—and ask the librarian to recommend the latest middle-school "must-reads."



## Begin with healthy habits

Healthy habits will help your middle schooler shine in class. These include:

- **Good sleep habits.** Make sure he gets to bed at a reasonable time each night. Have him "unplug"—no TV, loud music, text messaging or computer—in the hour leading up to bedtime.
- **A healthy lunch.** If your child packs his own lunch, make sure it's nutritious—and not a sack full of chips, cookies and soda. Growing middle schoolers need good nutrition!





## How can parents and kids survive adolescence?

**Q:** I know that the middle school years can be difficult—for my child and for me. How can I help my sixth grader navigate these next few years?

**A:** It's true that kids undergo lots of changes during adolescence. But relax. Those changes don't need to be negative. To make your middle schooler's adolescence as smooth as possible:

- **Stay informed.** Read up on common pre-teen issues. Ask your local librarian for book suggestions or look online. Knowing what to expect will help you be prepared.
- **Keep talking.** Let your middle schooler know she can always come to you with questions about her body, her feelings or school. The more you communicate, the more comfortable she may become about bringing things up with you.
- **Empathize.** Try to remember what your own preteen years were like. Keep in mind that your child is probably experiencing some of the same struggles and doubts you did.
- **Be alert.** Understand the warning signs that your preteen may have a serious problem. These include extreme weight changes, mood swings, sleeping difficulties or a sudden drop in grades. If you see a red flag, step in and get help.



## Are you helping your child transition?

The change from elementary to middle school is significant. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see how well you are helping your child manage this transition:

1. **Have you and your child** spoken to staff members and parents to learn about your new school?
2. **Do you ask** your child what he is thinking about middle school—and listen to his responses?
3. **Do you plan** to attend parent events in order to get more information that can help your child?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to talk to you and his teachers right away if he is having any difficulty?

5. **Do you tell** your child that you believe he can do well in school?

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

“The most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.”

—Jane D. Hull

## Share note-taking tips

Your child can't do a good job studying his notes if he doesn't have good notes to study. Help him master note-taking by sharing these tips:

- **Be an active listener.** Pay close attention to what the teacher is saying.
- **Focus on the key points.** Don't try to write down every word the teacher says.
- **Ask questions.** If you don't understand something, raise your hand.

## Get back into the groove

It's important for your child to get back into a school year rhythm. Here's how:

- **Reestablish routines.** If your child's old after-school routine was to grab a snack and then hit the books, make it easy for her to do that again. Greet her after school with a few nutritious treats and encourage her to get to work.
- **Tame the technology.** Studies show that too much screen time isn't good for kids, so limit TV, recreational computer use and video game time to an hour or two per day.

## Notes keep you in touch

Between your child's homework and activities and your own busy schedule, it can be hard to spend quality time together.

To let your child know that you're still thinking about him, slip a short message in his backpack or lunchbox every so often. A quick “I love you” or “Good luck on your science test!” may brighten his day. Just keep it discreet—you don't want to embarrass him in front of his friends!



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: 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