

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Back to school? Get back to basics

Whether this is your child's first year in middle school or you're both old pros, sticking to these four basic tips will keep your child on the path to school success. To help your child start the year strong:

1. Remember routines. You relied on routines when your child was a toddler—and they're still a great help in middle school! Maintaining routines will give structure to her day and help her stay organized. So develop some school-year rituals and stick with them.

2. Stay connected. It's not always easy to stay involved once your child reaches middle school, but it couldn't be more important. Getting involved shows your child—and her teachers—that her education matters. You don't need to be "Volunteer of the Year." Find ways to participate when you can and be supportive at home by asking your child about school.

3. Be informed. It's easy to miss the fliers or handouts stuffed in your middle schooler's backpack. Work out ways to keep her backpack organized. Then ask every day to see what she's brought home from school. Take time to look over her schoolwork. Just skimming her notes can fill you in on what's happening in class.

4. Offer support. Your middle schooler may act like she's "too cool" to need your love and guidance, but she's not. So never miss a chance to give her a hug or tell her you love her.



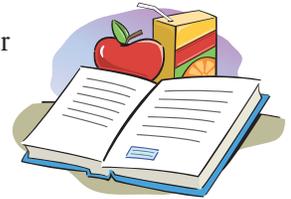
Promote health, attendance

Sticking with healthful practices will help you get your child off to school on time every day—alert and ready to learn. Strive to serve healthy foods, such as whole grains, produce and lean protein. Encourage your child to exercise regularly. And ensure your child gets enough sleep.

Get a handle on homework

Studies show that at least *half* of parents argue with their kids about homework. To turn homework from a hassle to a habit:

- **Find a method** that works for your child. If he can't work when he's hungry, set aside time for a healthy snack first.
- **Don't expect perfection.** Homework tells teachers where students may need additional instruction.
- **Show interest.** If he's writing a history report, say, "I never knew much about the War of 1812. How fascinating!"



Source: A.W. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School*, Teachers College Press.



Build character through family stories

Sharing family stories with your child is powerful. Hearing about relatives' struggles can help kids put their own issues in perspective. In fact, a recent study showed that kids who could retell family stories were less likely to be anxious or depressed—and also less likely to act out from anger or frustration.

To share family stories:

- **Find relevant tales.** Is the economy hitting your household hard? Chat about how your child's great-grandparents fed their five children during the Great Depression.

- **Laugh.** Family tales don't need to be somber to be powerful. Find funny ones to share. Is your child cringing about a big history test? Tell him about the time Uncle Charlie climbed up a tree to try to get out of the science fair.
- **Don't lecture.** Let the tales speak for themselves. And even if you suspect your child isn't really listening, chances are, he hears you loud and clear.

Source: S. Shellenbarger, "Life Stories: Children Find Meaning in Old Family Tales," *WSJ.com*, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123673699703791017.html>.

Expectations lead to success

Find time this fall to sit down with your child and review your expectations. Research shows children do best when parents:

- **Set** expectations in line with their child's age and level of maturity.
- **Help** children set and achieve short-term goals—like keeping school papers organized all week long.
- **Share** good news with others. Hearing you tell someone about her progress will make your child glow with inner pride.



Source: "Parent Involvement & Student Achievement," San Diego County Office of Education, www.sdcoe.net/lret2/family/pia.html.



How can parents set and enforce screen time limits?

Q: Over the summer, my son watched more TV and played more video games than he is normally allowed to. Now we argue whenever I try to limit his screen time. How can I curb this bad habit before it impacts his schoolwork?

A: Many parents relax rules a bit during the summer. But too much screen time can interfere with important activities, such as reading, socializing, exercising and learning. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 2 hours of television per day. Setting limits is the right thing to do. Try these strategies:

- **Turn off the TV for most of the day**, especially during meals. Keep TVs and computers in central locations—never in your child's room.
- **Change the schedule.** Notice when your child gravitates toward TV and video games. Plan fun things to do as a family during this time.
- **Increase awareness.** Have your child keep track of how many hours he spends on TV and video games per week. Together, make a list of other activities he could do during his downtime.
- **Choose wisely.** Replace mindless games or shows with high-quality alternatives. Whenever possible, watch together and discuss what you see.
- **Implement the "When ... then" rule.** For example, "When you complete your homework and chores, then you can turn on the TV."



Are you teaming up with teachers?

The beginning of the school year is the best time to build a good relationship with your child's teachers. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're working as a team:

- ___ **1. Do you communicate** with your child's teachers regularly?
- ___ **2. Do you give** teachers helpful information about your child?
- ___ **3. Do you ask** teachers what is expected of your child?
- ___ **4. Do you participate** in parent-teacher activities, like back-to-school night or conferences?
- ___ **5. Do you expect** your child to show respect for teachers?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're supporting your child's teachers this year. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

—Henry Ford

Plan for being home alone

When children are in middle school, they are often responsible enough to stay home alone. To keep your child as safe as possible:

- **Spell out** the rules in advance. Is your child allowed to answer the phone while you're away? How about the door?
- **Go over** kitchen safety. Set some guidelines about preparing food. Are the stove and oven off limits? What about the microwave?
- **Make** an evacuation plan. Teach your child where to go in case of a fire or weather emergency.

Strengthen comprehension

You can support your child as she moves on to higher-level reading in middle school. Suggest that she make:

- **Connections.** Have your child look for some "me, too" moments as she reads.
- **Pictures in her mind.** Ask, "What if you were to make a movie of this book?"
- **Predictions.** Ask, "What do you think is going to happen in the next chapter?"

Source: L. Robb, *Teaching Reading in Middle School*, Scholastic Professional Books.

Time: It's what's for dinner

Everyone leads hectic lives these days. Is a family meal worth the hassle? In a word, yes.

Research found that kids who regularly ate dinner with their families were less likely to try cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana—and twice as likely to get all A's.



Source: "Family Matters: Substance Abuse and the American Family," National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, www.casacolumbia.org/templates/PressReleases.aspx?articleid=383&zoneid=64.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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