

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Your child's own initiative is the key to middle school success

Middle school is an important milestone in your child's education. From this point on, he will be expected to take increased charge of his learning. Instead of being solely teacher-led, secondary education becomes more student-led—which better prepares students for success in college and careers. To help your child develop initiative, encourage him to:



- **Stand up for himself** and his education. He should think about what he needs to be successful. Suggest he get to know his teachers so he feels comfortable approaching them.
- **Actively participate in class.** He should ask questions and give opinions when appropriate.
- **Get help at the first sign of a problem.** He can begin by asking the teacher when he or she is available for extra help.
- **Make an effort to get along** with his teachers and other students. Everyone learns better in a pleasant environment.
- **Avoid coasting.** If all his classes are easy, he may not be in the right classes.
- **Think about what he is learning.** Tell him to ask himself, "How does this relate to something I have learned before?"

Source: H. Wolpert-Gawron, "Equation of Success: Top Ten Responsibilities that Students Must Own," Edutopia, niswc.com/initiative.



A new year: five ways to start smart

The beginning of a new school year is a time full of promise and hopes for the future. To help your child put her best foot forward:

1. **Embrace routines.** Whether it's a set homework time or regular weeknight family dinners, rituals ease the transition back to school.
 2. **Enforce bedtime.** It can be hard to go to bed earlier, especially after a "stay up late" summer. But your child won't be at her best in class if she needs sleep.
 3. **Outline expectations.** Tell your child you expect her to take responsibility for her education.
- "I bailed you out last year by bringing in work you forgot. Now that you're in 7th grade, that stops."
4. **Be supportive.** Middle school can be intimidating. Remind your child often that you believe in her and are on her side.
 5. **Back off.** Your child is no longer a baby—so don't treat her like one. Respect the fact that she's growing up and give her space to stretch her wings.

Take attendance seriously

Studies show kids who skip school often are more likely to repeat a grade, get expelled or drop out. To make attendance a priority:

- **Be firm.** School comes first.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school is not always easy or fun.
- **Be proactive.** Find out why your child is avoiding school.

Source: "Truancy Prevention," National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, niswc.com/attend.

Read with the goal in mind

Not all reading is the same. Just as there are many kinds of reading material, there are different ways to read, depending on our goals. Remind your child of the main ways to read:



- **A quick read or skim** gives an early idea of what the text is about. Look for pictures, headlines and bold-faced text.
- **A deep read** is the way to really learn. Take notes on the main ideas and facts.
- **A reread** of new or difficult material improves comprehension. Once is not always enough.

Source: "Reading Tips for Parents of Middle School Students," Virginia Beach, VA schools.

Conversation is two-way

Many adolescents would rather talk to their friends than to their parents. But kids who don't talk enough with their parents tend to make poor choices—academically and socially. To keep communication open:



- **Look for chances to talk.** Grab time while washing dishes or driving.
- **Be open—not critical.** Think before you react. If your child doesn't feel safe telling you bad news, he won't tell you.



Where is the line between active and overcommitted?

Q: I urged my child to get involved with school activities last year, but she overdid it, and her grades suffered. How can I help her strike a balance between extracurricular activities and her studies this year?

A: You said the magic word: balance. The trick is for your child to get the benefits of extracurricular activities—enjoyment, friendship, etc.—without becoming so overextended that she can't complete her schoolwork.

To help her find that balance:

- **Encourage her to prioritize.** Which activities did your child enjoy most last year? Which benefited her the most? Ask her to think honestly about these questions. Don't settle for "I loved doing everything!"
- **List the pros and cons.** Once your child has narrowed down her favorites, have her list the pluses and minuses of each one. Help her see each activity with a critical—and clear—eye.
- **Devise a plan.** Keeping each activity's pros and cons in mind, help your child select one or two to join this fall. Then, in a few weeks, take a look at the situation. If she's struggling in class, make some changes. But if she's thriving, she may have struck the right balance!



Is your child prepared to stay ahead?

A few organizational tips will make a world of difference for your child in middle school. Are you sharing this effective advice with him for keeping up and learning well? Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to prepare for class by bringing the appropriate books and supplies?
- ___ **2. Do you remind** your child to record assignments and test dates in a planner?
- ___ **3. Do you urge** your child to check the online resources the school offers?
- ___ **4. Do you remind** your child that there are no "stupid questions" if he wants to learn?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to seek out the teacher

for extra help if he is having trouble?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are setting your child up to stay on top of his studies. For each no, try that idea.

"Limits and structure form the foundation of the stable platform that adolescents use to launch themselves into adulthood."

—Michael Riera

Approach discipline calmly

Discipline can be a tricky business. There's no one-size-fits-all method, and your child is constantly changing. Keep your bearings by adopting a consistent approach—even as specific rules and penalties evolve. Try to:

- **Control yourself.** Avoid disciplining your child when you are angry.
- **Address your child's emotions.** Help her calm down before taking action.
- **Listen.** Avoid responding to misbehavior automatically. Hear her side first.
- **Draw clear lines.** If a rule isn't negotiable, make sure your child understands.

Source: Scott Brown, *How to Negotiate with Kids ... Even When You Think You Shouldn't*, Penguin.

Fitness builds strong minds

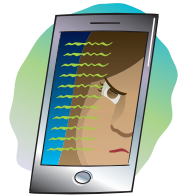
You know that exercise helps fight obesity. But did you know that it may also help your child think more effectively?

Research says that active students do better in school. Exercise increases the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain, improving thinking ability. It also reduces stress.

Source: UPI Health News, "Exercise may boost academic performance," niscw.com/fit-brain.

Help prevent cyberbullying

Physical and verbal bullying is not allowed in any school. And in middle school, where many students use social media and texting, kids need to know how to defend against cyberbullying, too. Together with your child:



- **Review the rules.** Read the school handbook and learn what language is allowed, and what is considered a threat.
- **Discuss consequences.** Be sure your child understands that actions off school grounds may affect her at school, too.

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