

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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Educational Service Unit 10

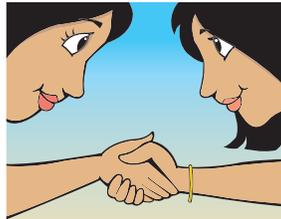
December 2008

DISCIPLINE

Parents & teens *can* compromise

Your preteen wants more freedom. You want her to follow the rules and do as she's told. Can you both get what you want? Absolutely. To balance her need for independence with your need for obedience:

- **Set fair, reasonable limits.** Your preteen may balk at rules, but they help her feel secure and loved. The earlier you set limits, the better. Also be specific. If you want her to clean her room, explain how a clean room looks.
- **Pick your battles.** Rather than argue with your preteen over endless things, ask yourself, "Is this a big deal?" If not (such as an outfit that doesn't match), let it go. If so (such as something dangerous), speak up.
- **Offer choices.** Within reason, give your preteen chances to make decisions. For example, would she rather do homework before or after dinner? This gives her a sense of control.
- **Increase freedom.** As your preteen matures, reward her with privileges. If she's responsible about small purchases, for instance, eventually you might give her a clothing allowance.
- **Guide without controlling.** Listen to your preteen and ask questions that encourage thinking about choices—and their consequences.



Source: "Independence—Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/adolescence/part7.html.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Spending time together matters!

What gets lost in all the "bad news" about families today? The good news! Research shows that common family activities help kids thrive. For example:

- **Sticking to routines.** Basic things like doing chores and eating dinner together can keep families bonded. Kids from families that follow routines are less likely to use drugs or be suspended.
- **Communicating.** Studies show that most adolescents get praise from their parents. And half look to their parents for guidance.
- **Having fun together.** Research shows that simply "doing stuff together"—even if it's just playing cards or watching a ball game—leads to kids who are less likely to engage in risky behaviors or get in trouble at school.

Source: Kristin Anderson Moore and others, "Family Strengths: Often Overlooked, But Real," ChildTrends.org, www.childtrends.org/Files/FamilyStrengths.pdf.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Build a partnership with teens' teachers

Even the best students sometimes need a little "boost." A joint effort with the school can help. Talk to the school. Teachers want to help and have lots of good ideas. Ask for ways you can strengthen your preteen's learning skills at home.

Source: Natalie Rathvon, *The Unmotivated Child*, ISBN: 0-684-80306-2 (Fireside, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

HEALTHY HABITS

Encourage healthy eating

Diets often change for the worse as kids approach adolescence. Teens may eat too much junk food—or too little food overall. To promote healthy eating:

- **Keep** nutritious options handy.
- **Aim** for regular meals and snacks.
- **Don't** let your child cut calories unless he's talked with a doctor.
- **Compliment**—don't criticize—his looks.

Source: "Healthy Eating: A Guide for Teens," Center for Young Women's Health, www.youngwomenshealth.org/healthyeating.html.

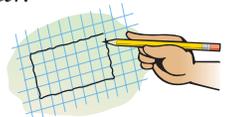


BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Review key math concepts

In middle school, kids build on concepts they learned in elementary school—like measuring *area* and *perimeter*. Here's an easy way to practice. Draw a rectangle on graph paper. Count the squares inside it. This is the *area*. To find the *perimeter*, add up the number of blocks on each of the four sides.

Source: Virginia Thompson and Karen Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math: The Middle School Years*, ISBN: 0-912511-29-X (Lawrence Hall of Science, 510-642-5132, www.lhs.berkeley.edu).



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents keep preteens on track during vacations?

Q: We'll be traveling over the holidays and my child might have to miss some school. How can I keep him from falling too far behind?

A: It's important to schedule vacations around the school calendar. Regular school attendance is that critical! But if your child absolutely must be away, you can minimize the impact on his grades. Here's how:

- **Plan ahead.** Talk to your child's teachers before you leave. Explain how long you'll be gone. Ask for copies of assignments so your child can work while you're away.
- **Prepare for your return.** Talk to your child's teachers about setting up a work schedule when he returns. Ask if they would consider giving him a short grace period during which he can hand everything in.
- **Use technology.** If you'll have computer access while on vacation, see if your child can stay connected to school via the Internet. His teachers may let him use email or classroom websites to keep up.
- **Maintain a schedule.** Let your child relax and have fun on vacation, but don't allow him to abandon schoolwork entirely. Set aside a period each day for him to complete assigned readings or review class notes.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you encouraging winter reading?

The cold days of winter break are a great time to encourage your middle schooler to read for pleasure. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're providing access to many reading opportunities:

- ___ **1. Do you share** reading material with your child (like interesting newspaper articles)?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to try different types of reading (like science fiction instead of fantasy literature)?
- ___ **3. Do you take** your child to the library frequently?
- ___ **4. Do you try** creative ways to draw your child into reading, (such as reading a book and then watching the movie)?
- ___ **5. Do you stress** reading as a family activity?

How did you do? *Each yes answer means you're promoting the reading habit. For each no answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.*

*"Attitudes are contagious.
Is yours worth catching?"*
—Dennis and Wendy Manning

Show your adolescent how to follow through

Middle schoolers are easily distracted. It can be a challenge to follow through on what a parent or teacher has requested. To help your child get it in gear:

- **Be specific.** Say exactly what you expect and when you expect it.
- **Check progress.** Ask how she thinks she is doing. Share helpful ideas.
- **Be encouraging.** "Congratulations. Keep up the good work!"

STUDY SKILLS

Set a study schedule

A study routine can help middle schoolers avoid procrastination and finish their assignments more quickly. Have your child work in the same place at the same time each day. He can pick the spot—as long as it's reasonable and free of distractions.

Encourage him to make a schedule of how he plans to spend his study time. Remind him to include short (five- to 10-minute) breaks every hour.

REINFORCING LEARNING

Review history in order

Middle school kids are still developing their sense of time. They learn about events, but they may not put them in perspective. For example, which came first—The Cold War or the Gulf War? Help your child:

- **Make a giant timeline.** As she learns interesting dates in school, she can jot them down in order.
- **Keep a "Book of Centuries."** Put blank pages in a loose-leaf notebook. Each sheet should represent 100 years. Enter interesting information on the correct pages.



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

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