

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

January 2009

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Build on lessons learned at school

Who is your middle schooler's most important teacher? You! So commit to playing a key role in his education. To reinforce school learning:

- **Make a game plan.** Does your child like to study right after school, or does he need an hour to unwind first? Consider what has worked in the past (and what hasn't), and then establish good habits. Stick to a regular bedtime, too.
- **Ask about school.** Make time for casual conversation each day, perhaps over dinner or on a walk. Discuss what your child is studying and what matters to him. Talk about academic subjects and what your child is learning about himself.
- **Communicate with the school.** In middle school, parents may contact an advisor, team leader, teachers or other staff members. Helpful information, including email addresses, may be available on the school website.
- **Pursue new interests.** Encourage your child to find ways of contributing to the world. He might volunteer, for instance, or support a cause he loves. He's bound to use his knowledge—and learn a lot more. Let your child know how proud you are of his efforts.



Source: "Five Ways to Help Your Young Adolescent Be Successful in Middle School," *The Family Connection*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (National Middle School Association, 1-800-528-6672, www.nmsa.org).

## BUILDING RESPECT

### Teach your child to use the 'sandwich method' when talking to teachers

"It's not *what* you say; it's *how* you say it." That old saying contains a lot of truth. Your child can ask for something in one way and be perfectly respectful. Or she could ask the same thing in another way and wind up in trouble.

Suggest your child "make a sandwich" to respectfully speak to her teachers. Model these steps for her:

- **"First layer of bread"**—Say something nice, especially something that shows you've been paying attention in class.
- **"Filling"**—Ask politely for what you need.
- **"Top layer of bread"**—Say another nice thing, such as thanking the teacher for previous help.

Source: Tom McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids*, ISBN: 1-57542-132-1 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

## HOMESCHOOL

### Recommit to homework

January can be a difficult month. Getting back to homework, after a long time away from her desk, can be difficult for your child.

To get back to basics:

- **Reestablish** a homework time and place.
- **Restock** supplies.
- **Check** her homework planner.

To get homework finished:

- **Help** your child set a schedule.
- **Offer** encouragement. "You can do it!" "You're getting there!"
- **Emphasize** always doing her best, not just getting it "done."

Source: Sydney S. Zentall and Sam Goldstein, *Seven Steps to Homework Success*, ISBN: 1-886941-22-X (Specialty Press, Inc. 1-800-233-9273, www.addwarehouse.com).

## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Get a handle on time

A true understanding of time—how long it takes to accomplish a task—is something that eludes many middle schoolers. To practice time management, have your child:

- **Use an analog clock.** Watching the hands move reinforces passing of time.
- **Estimate, then record** the actual time it takes him to do something.



## DEALING WITH TOUGH ISSUES

### Don't share medications

Many kids give or sell their prescription drugs to classmates. Some don't realize how wrong and dangerous this is. Tell your child that sharing medications is:

- **Unsafe.** Some children end up in the hospital after taking others' drugs.
- **Against school policy.** It can violate the law.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents prevent mid-year burnout?

**Q: My middle schooler is already starting to feel burned out. She started the year strong and I'd like her to continue to do well. What can I do to help her?**

**A:** You still have time to help your middle schooler fix that "mid-year slump." Talk with your child to find out why she's struggling. Are her classes too difficult? Does she have too much homework? If so, speak to her teachers. Also check her after-school schedule—is she trying to fit in too many activities?

But if her problem is a lack of motivation, try these ideas:

- **Help her acknowledge success.** Rather than looking at an endless semester of quizzes, for instance, help her zero in on next Friday's quiz only. The more often she experiences minor victories, the better she may feel.
- **Celebrate past achievements.** Flip through your child's assignment book and talk about how far she's already come. "Remember how worried you were about that science project last November? Didn't it feel great to earn that B+?"
- **Reward her.** Yes, good grades should be their own reward. But that doesn't mean you can't offer your child incentives for doing well or staying motivated. "If you study hard for that big math test, I'll take you and your friends out for burgers when it's all over."



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you monitoring screen time?

Middle schoolers love their electronics. But when time spent in front of a television or computer gets out of hand, grades and social activities can suffer. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're keeping your child's screen time in check:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you monitor** your child's use of electronics?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you set** limits on your child's screen time?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you check** the ratings and content of TV shows, movies and video games?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you supervise** your child's Internet usage?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you talk** with your child about negative messages he may get from media?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're doing a great job of managing your child's screen time. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."  
—Malcolm S. Forbes

## IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

### Give attendance priority

Your preteen won't learn much at school if he doesn't spend enough time there. So it's critical that you insist on—and enforce—good attendance. Make education a top priority. Show him that you take the school's attendance rules seriously. Let him know that school is his biggest responsibility and that nothing—not friends, not playing, not going to the mall—comes before it.

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Show daily uses of math

Experts say that as they get older, some students lose interest in science and math. Parents are encouraged to set a good example. For instance, don't joke about not being able to handle math tasks. Show how useful—and meaningful—math skills are.

Source: Natasha T. Metzler, "Encouraging girls key for improving science education," The Associated Press, [www.usatoday.com/tech/science/2006-05-15-girls-in-science\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/2006-05-15-girls-in-science_x.htm).

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Encourage 'alone time'

It may seem your middle schooler can't move two feet unless she has a friend with her doing the exact same thing. But this is a good time to impress on your child that she should also be happy with her own company. Make sure she has time for herself to engage in some solitary activities, such as:

- **Reading.**
- **Drawing** or other creative crafts
- **Exercising.**
- **Cooking.**



Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 15-7542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.  
Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Managing Editor: Patricia Hodgdon.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern. Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Susan O'Brien & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant:

Pat Carter. Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2009, The Parent Institute<sup>®</sup>, a division of NIS, Inc.

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

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1021