

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

October 2008

HOMWORK

Help your preteen with homework

You can't do your preteen's homework for her, but you can help her as she buckles down. To do this:

- **Teach organization.** If your preteen can't find her homework, she'll have a tough time completing it. Show her how to use folders or dividers to organize each subject. Give her a small notebook or calendar where she can record daily assignments.
- **Reinforce the basics.** It may be the Internet age, but preteens should still know how to use reference books. Show her how to use thesauruses, atlases and encyclopedias at the library. Ask a librarian for help if needed.
- **Use a checklist.** Each afternoon, run through a homework checklist with your preteen. Ask: What are today's assignments? Do you understand what you're supposed to do? Do you have a study plan? Will you need any special supplies, such as a report cover?
- **Turn off the tube.** Don't buy your preteen's argument that TV is "just background noise." According to research, the amount of time kids spend in front of the TV directly relates to their school performance. So keep homework time distraction free.



Source: Anthony W. Jackson and P. Gayle Andrews, *Making the Most of Middle School*, ISBN: 0-8077-4476-X (Teachers College Press, 212-678-3929, www.tcpress.com).

ENCOURAGING WRITING

Experiment with many types of writing

In middle school, your child will be asked to write fiction and nonfiction. He'll also have to use different formats, such as:

- **Creative writing.** This might be a story, poem or play—anything your child chooses to make up. Each piece should have a beginning, middle and end.
- **Explanation.** Your child will present a report on something he wants the reader to know, such as how to complete a task. Clear writing is key.
- **Personal essay.** In this written conversation, your child will explain something he believes or has experienced. Organized ideas are essential.
- **Persuasive essay.** This is an effort to convince the reader that one view is correct. Your child should include plenty of related examples supporting his view.

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, 1-800-323-7445, www.simonsays.com).

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Good attendance is key

Your preteen won't do well in school if he doesn't go to school. It's that simple. To help him get up and out the door on time:

- **Establish routines.** Have him prepare for school the night before.
- **Enforce a bedtime.** Adolescents require nine to 10 hours of sleep nightly. So determine what time he needs to wake up in the morning, and count backward from there to decide on his bedtime.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Enjoy family time at home

Family outings and special activities with your child are great. But middle schoolers also value:

- **Routine days at home,** knowing a loving adult is there.
- **Quiet time to read,** listen to music, play with the dog—or simply daydream.



Source: Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, *Talking To Tweens*, ISBN: 0-7382-1019-6 (Da Capo Press, 1-800-255-1514, www.dacapopress.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Put your adolescent in charge of responsibility

Your preteen can handle tasks that you recently had to do yourself. Consider increasing your expectations. To help your child meet responsibilities:

- **Stop nagging.** Your child knows she needs to do schoolwork and chores.
- **Use lists and calendars.** Put her in charge of checking and monitoring them.



Source: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, *The Roller-Coaster Years*, ISBN: 0-553-06684-6 (Broadway, a division of Random House, 1-800-733-3000, <http://randomhouse.com/broadway>).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents stay involved during middle school?

Q: I have always been involved in my child's education. I'd like to continue to volunteer in his classes, but now that he's in middle school, he's embarrassed to see me at school. Has the time come for me to back off and let him be more independent?

A: Absolutely not. In middle school, the number of parents willing to pitch in tends to decrease. Yet schools rely on parent volunteers more than ever. Volunteers not only help overworked staff—their presence also shows students that they value education.

To keep your involvement strong:

- **Talk to your child about his complaints.** "I realize you don't want me to volunteer at school. Is there something specific you're worried about?"
- **Remember that social pressure to fit in** during middle school is huge. "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me at school?" If he says *yes*, have him put himself in their shoes. Would he find their volunteering parents weird? Or would it be no big deal?
- **Respect your child's feelings.** If you've talked it over, but he's still nervous about seeing you in class, volunteer in other areas. You don't need to be in your child's classroom to have a positive effect on his school.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you promoting organization?

Organization is a necessary skill for success in middle school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child get organized.

1. **Do you expect** your child to record her assignments in a planner each day?
2. **Have you helped** your child create a system for keeping homework organized?
3. **Do you remind** your child to review her planner before leaving her locker at the end of the day?
4. **Does your child have** a set time and place to study each evening?
5. **Do you have** your child pack her backpack before bed?

How are you doing? Each *yes* answer means you're doing a great job teaching your adolescent how to be organized. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"Children love to learn,
but hate to be taught."
—Unknown

Enforce consequences

Time-out used to be a workable discipline tool. Disciplining your adolescent takes a bit more effort. To set expectations and enforce consequences:

- **Be specific.** "Put your schoolwork in your backpack and put away your cleats." (Not, "Clean up your mess.")
- **Be clear about penalties.** "One more missed homework assignment, and no TV for two weeks." (Not, "You'd better turn in that homework or else.")

Source: David Walsh, Ph.D., *Why Do They Act That Way?* ISBN: 0-7432-6071-6 (Free Press, 212-632-4971, www.simonsays.com).

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Encourage friendships

This is a time in your child's life when peers are just about the most important people. To help your child develop some good friendships, encourage her to:

- **Introduce herself** to students who seem friendly. A smile is usually a good sign.
- **Join a club** or activity. She'll meet people with interests that match hers.

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Analyze during breakfast

Your child's favorite cereal box is covered in math problems! Help him build math skills with questions like these:

- **How many servings** are in the box? What is the serving size? Given this, how many cups of cereal are in the box? (Example: 30 servings x ½ cup = 15 cups.)
- **How many calories** are in each serving? If you eat one serving a day for 15 days, how many calories will you take in? (Example: 120 calories x 15 = 1,800.)



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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.

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

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021