

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

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MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Inspire your student this year

Too often, talking about children's education is like talking about health. Nothing is said unless something is wrong. Try turning that around. Make a point to praise your child for good work whenever you can. It's a great way to help her succeed in school. Here are some other ways to support her learning:

- **Expect her best.** If you are satisfied with half an effort, your child will be, too. Some kids need extra help to do their best. If your child is a student who needs assistance, talk with her teachers and take steps to get that help.
- **Give extra comfort during hard times.** This may be tough to do if your family is having problems, but it's necessary. Each day, reassure your child that you love her and you appreciate her. Be sure to inform her teacher of any changes that might affect her concentration in class.
- **Compliment her teachers and school.** If you have complaints, address them calmly. Stay upbeat in front of your child and send the message that even if there are difficulties, you still believe that school is good and important. When education is your priority, it probably will be your child's priority also.



Source: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, *The Roller Coaster Years*, ISBN: 0-5530-6684-6 (Broadway Books, www.randomhouse.com/broadway).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Build responsibility without arguing

Getting middle schoolers to pitch in and complete their chores can be a huge challenge. To teach your child to follow through on his responsibilities:

- **Prepare for give and take.** Consider what's most important to you. Negotiate on things that are less significant.
- **Break down big jobs.** Cleaning a messy bedroom might seem impossible. Identify each task: make the bed, pick up clothes, etc.
- **Use daily to-do lists.** Weekly lists can overwhelm. Completing daily lists gives a frequent sense of accomplishment.
- **Offer helpful reminders.** Don't nag your child. Try writing a note and leaving it on your child's pillow.
- **Be the boss, but be friendly.** Try not to criticize your child. Use humor to get along. Give plenty of genuine compliments.

Source: Judith Baenen, "10 Tips for Living in Peace with Your Middle-School Child," American School Counselors Association, <http://life.familyeducation.com/page/57480.html>.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Get involved this year

Middle school students need parental support. And teachers and parent groups depend on your participation. Here are some important things to do:

- **Ask your child** if he brought home any messages from school.
- **Read school notes** and respond.
- **Attend as many** school events as you can, including teacher conferences.
- **Be a role model** by reading and learning.

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Aim for good attendance

Strong school attendance is important to your child's school career. Most children have trouble keeping up if they miss more than a few days. To encourage attendance:

- **Tell** your child that school is extremely important to you and the family.
- **Avoid** taking your child out of school to babysit younger children.
- **Schedule** your child's medical or dental appointments for non-school hours whenever possible.



BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Learning thrives at home

You don't need a fancy degree to reinforce your middle schooler's learning. You just need to be creative!

Take math outdoors. Are you planning to mulch your garden for the fall? Have your middle schooler measure the length and width of your flower beds.

Together, figure out how many square feet you'll need to cover. How much is needed?



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help middle schoolers get organized?

Q: My son started middle school this fall. I'm afraid he won't be able to keep track of all he has to do—he has enough trouble getting his dirty clothes into the hamper. What can I do to help him get—and stay—organized?

A: Any student—even an academic star—will have trouble in middle school if he is not organized. Not having books needed for homework, or the tools to do it or not knowing when it is due, will be a serious setback. Being organized is crucial for student success. To help keep your middle schooler organized, suggest:



- **A binder** or file with different tabs. Inexpensive choices are available at discount stores. Your child should assign one section to each subject and keep papers from each subject in the correct section. Once a week, he should weed out old papers.
- **A backpack** or sturdy school bag. Your child should pack it each night with the things he needs for the next day.
- **A daily checklist** taped to the front of his binder. It may read: Do I have my books? My homework?
- **A regular locker clean-out.** Students' lockers are supposed to be for books, but are often filled with personal items and even trash. Encourage your child to do a "locker dump" every Friday. He can bring the excess home and dispose of it. Lockers that are not regularly cleaned out soon become difficult to close!

PARENT QUIZ

Are you counteracting peer pressure?

Peer influence can be positive *or* negative, depending on your child's friends. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see how well you're helping your child combat negative peer pressure:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about doing the right thing rather than the easy thing?
- ___ **2. Do you suggest** ways your child can say "no" to things she knows are wrong?
- ___ **3. Do you empathize** with your child about the desire to fit in?
- ___ **4. Are you clear** with your child about your family rules?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to think about the results of her decisions?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child resist the push of negative peer pressure. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them."
—Lady Bird Johnson

Answer 'why homework?'

Doing homework may not be your child's idea of fun, but it's something she has to do. And if she asks why, say that homework:

- **Lets** her practice new concepts at her own pace.
- **Promotes** independent learning.
- **Gives** you an opportunity to see what she is learning.
- **Gives** teachers a chance to monitor each student's progress.

BUILDING CHARACTER

Share family values

Teaching good values can be especially hard during the middle school years, when some children test parents by rebelling. To emphasize your values:

- **Be a role model.** Put the things that are most important to you first, such as family time and staying healthy.
- **Notice good behavior.** When your child makes responsible decisions, compliment him.
- **Discuss poor behavior.** Expect your child to live by your family's values. When he doesn't, hold him accountable.
- **Give examples.** Discuss times when others have shown integrity. "Joey saw a woman drop some money, and he returned it to her."

Source: "Teaching Values in the Home," *Better Homes and Gardens* (Meredith Corporation, www.bhg.com).

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Make room for family fun

Even as kids become more independent, they still need family time.

Plan activities your child enjoys. You might have a family movie night or cook your child's favorite meal together once a week. Find ways to make family time fun.



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

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