

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

April 2024

Three strategies can help your child boost long-term memory

Education gives students a body of knowledge they can draw on in the future. That's why the ability to retain and recall information—particularly in the long-term—is so critical to academic success.

To support long-term learning, help your middle schooler:

- 1. Practice recalling** information. The act of retrieving information helps reinforce it in your child's memory. Ask your middle schooler to teach the material to you. Offer to work with flash cards together. Or, challenge your child to write down as much as possible about a topic without referring back to class notes.
- 2. Make topics meaningful.** Research shows that relating information to something meaningful is a more effective way to memorize it than simply repeating it over and over. To memorize vocabulary words, for example, your child could write a story using those words.
- 3. Put concepts into context.** When your child is trying to remember the material in Chapter Four of a text, suggest spending a few minutes looking at the summaries of the surrounding chapters. This can help clarify how Chapter Four relates to the whole unit. Understanding that connection can improve your child's memory of the information in the chapter.

Source: G. DiTullio, "How to Engage Students' Memory Processes to Improve Learning," Edutopia.



Offer a digital way to read

Today there are more ways than ever for children to enjoy the benefits of reading. Like print books, audiobooks and e-books expose children to story structure, compelling plots and new vocabulary. And listening or scrolling through a digital book may have more appeal for a plugged-in middle schooler. Look for free titles to download on public library websites.



Is it a reliable source?

Advances in artificial intelligence mean that many websites and social media posts look "authoritative"—even when they aren't. Remind your child to check out sources before using them. An internet search on the source's name can help identify issues or show that other reputable sources cite it.

Source: S. Weinberg, "Students Are Easily Duped Online. We Can Teach Them Better," EducationWeek.

Explore career possibilities

One goal of education is to prepare students to do productive work as adults. Exploring careers now can help your child make the most of opportunities in school. To help:

- **Ask your child's teachers** or counselor about career exploration and enrichment resources.
- **Help your child** develop strengths and interests. Encourage involvement in extra-curricular activities and volunteering.
- **Learn together.** Read about education and skill requirements and salaries in fields that interest your child in the Occupational Outlook Handbook at www.bls.gov/ooh/.



Keep the lines of communication open

Finding out what's going on in the life of a guarded preteen can be trickier than talking to a chatty elementary schooler. Ask one wrong question, and your child may explode or stop talking altogether.

To keep communicating flowing:

- **Ask open-ended questions.** "What are you studying in science this week?" "What has made you feel proud recently?"
- **Take your child's words** and feelings seriously. A problem that seems minor to you is very likely major to your child. If you dismiss it, your child will be even less likely to share next time.
- **Arrange times** when your child knows you are available to talk. Stop what you are doing and listen if your child does open up.
- **Encourage your child** to speak to other trusted adults if you aren't available. Whether it's a teacher, a relative or a friend's parent, your child needs to have someone to discuss school and life with.

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How do I get my kids to stop fighting and start solving?

Q: My children don't get along. Every disagreement they have seems to turn into a fight, and I always get caught in the middle. How can I help them learn to resolve conflicts peacefully?

A: Whether they are facing conflicts with siblings, classmates or eventually, bosses and co-workers, children need to know how to resolve them peacefully and respectfully.

You don't want to referee every squabble between your children, and you shouldn't. Instead, teach them to:

- **Discuss little issues** before they become big ones. When little things are ignored, they can grow into major disputes.
- **Speak in "I-messages."** Encourage your children to talk about their own feelings, rather than the other person's mistakes. Instead of "You always take my charger," your middle schooler could say, "I feel angry when you take something without asking to borrow it first."
- **Listen to the other person.** It is the only way to understand someone else's point of view.
- **Work together on a compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they each have a problem. To solve it, they will probably both need to make changes. Help your children focus on solutions, rather than placing blame.



Are you helping your middle schooler tackle academic challenges?

It's common for students to find one class more challenging than the rest. The reasons why differ, but the same steps can help to address the situation. Do you know what to do if your child is struggling? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you talk** together about the class, and ask what your student thinks the problem may be?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to talk with the teacher and develop a plan for improving?
3. **Do you have** your child set aside time to study for the class every day?
4. **Do you ask** your child's teacher or counselor about resources for help, such as tutoring?
5. **Do you monitor** your child's work in the class and celebrate every sign of progress?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are ready to help your child overcome difficulties in a class. For each no, try that idea.

"Life's a climb. But the view is great."

—Miley Cyrus

Prepare to cure test anxiety

Anxiety about tests can make it harder for students to show what they know. In most cases, a few things help ease it. When a test is announced, encourage your child to:

- **Ask questions.** What is the scope of the test? What does a high or low score mean for your child? What will the format be?
- **Prepare appropriately.** Your child can ask the teacher about practice tests and other ways to study.
- **Remember that one test** won't change your student's entire future.
- **Get plenty of sleep,** eat breakfast on test day and dress comfortably in layers.

Make a plan for discipline

One way to avoid arguments with your child over rules and discipline is to create a written plan. Together, identify your five most important rules and the consequences for breaking them. Allow your child to express opinions about them, but make final decisions yourself. Post the plan prominently.

Now, instead of being drawn into an argument, you can just point to the plan. Review and revise it as your child shows an ability to stay within boundaries.

Talk about a power shift

A negative attitude toward school often results from feeling helpless. For example, your child probably can't change which classes are required.

Focusing on having to take a disliked subject would leave any student feeling helpless and negative.



Shift the focus to things your child *does* have the power to change. If your child prepares and participates more, classes in the subject will likely become more interesting. A feeling of empowerment can improve attitude—and school success.

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