

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

April 2025

Shop for financial literacy and math skills at the grocery store

When your child was younger, every trip to the grocery store offered opportunities for learning. You could ask your child to look for foods of different colors and shapes, or practice reading skills by finding words on the packaging.

The grocery store is also an ideal place for middle schoolers to learn important financial literacy lessons and build math skills. As you shop, ask your child to:



- **Calculate the savings** of buying in bulk. Suppose the store offers cans of soup for \$1.00 each, but sells four cans for \$3.75. How much would your family save by taking advantage of the special every week for a year?
- **Stick to a budget.** Challenge your middle schooler to buy all the things on your shopping list, plus two treats, and stay within a set budget.
- **Graph prices over time.** Name two items, such as a jar of spaghetti sauce and a carton of one dozen eggs, and have your child track their prices for three months on a graph. What trends or patterns does your child notice? Are there any regular price dips when you could save money by stocking up?
- **Calculate volume.** Ask your child to figure out the volume of the boxes of cereal or pasta you are buying. (Volume is length x width x height.)

Source: V. Perrone, *101 Educational Conversations with Your 6th Grader*, Chelsea House Publishers.



Friends are a key school connection

Forming friendships with other students at school can help your child feel a sense of belonging that supports academic achievement.

Relationships with peers take on increasing importance in the middle school years. To help your student develop positive friendships:

- **Encourage saying hello** to new students or any classmate who seems friendly. A smile and a greeting is a sign that your child is open to making friends.
- **Suggest that your child** keep an eye out for students with similar interests. Joining clubs

and activities makes this easier. It's hard to spot a child who likes the same things walking down the hall, but in a robotics club meeting, it's a safe bet that the other kids are interested in robots, too.

- **Support friendships** that have potential. If your child has been eating lunch with the same three students for a month, suggest inviting them to join your family for a weekend activity.

Share tips for taking tests

Before your child's next test, review these strategies that help students do their best:

- **Read the instructions twice.**
- **Underline words** that clarify what your child is being asked to do, such as *compare*, *list*, *describe*, *define* or *summarize*.
- **Think about the answer** to a question before reading any choices provided.
- **Allow time to go back** and double-check answers. Do they make sense?

Ask questions about choices

Middle schoolers make decisions—often without thought—that affect school and life. Help your child focus on them by asking questions like:

- *Do you take schoolwork seriously, or do only as much as necessary?*
- *Do you feel comfortable coming to me with questions or problems?*
- *Does your friends' behavior matter to you?*



Stay tuned to attendance

On a warm spring day, your child might prefer to be anywhere other than in class. But regular, on-time attendance—through the last day of school—leads to better student outcomes. To reinforce its importance:



- **Make it clear** that you expect your child to be in every class on time every day.
- **Be firm.** Don't accept any misguided excuses—being tired or unprepared are not valid reasons to miss class.
- **Monitor attendance records**, and if your child has been skipping, ask why.

Work with the school if you find out your child's attendance has been slipping. Many attendance problems can be solved when families and schools work together.

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My child doesn't want to listen to me. What can I do?

Q: I've heard, "Parents are their child's most influential teachers." But these days, I can't seem to teach my middle schooler anything. How can I keep my child from resisting what I have to teach?

A: Middle schoolers who are expressing their independence don't like being told what to do. When it comes to teaching kids this age, the key is to be persuasive. One effective approach is to think of yourself as an ethical salesperson. Ethical selling helps people make decisions that are right for them. Here's how to do it:

- **Ask lots of questions** that help your child think choices through.
- **Really listen** to what your child says.
- **Use the information** to steer your child toward a satisfactory choice.

When you want to make a particular point to your middle schooler:

- **Simply state your viewpoint** without insisting that your child agree.
- **Explain your reasoning** in a clear way your child can understand.
- **Be positive.** Assume your child will learn.
- **Teach what to do**, rather than what not to do. And don't just *tell* your child what to do. Demonstrate *how* to do it. Model the skills or values you want your middle schooler to learn.
- **Provide positive reinforcement** when your child complies.



Are you matching time with priorities?

When things get busy, it's easy to shortchange your priorities—like your child and your child's education. Are you giving most of your time to the things that matter most? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you make** a plan for how you'll spend your time each day?

___ **2. Do you set aside** regular time to spend with your child?

___ **3. Do you prioritize** the items on your to-do list so you can do what's most vital if there's not time for everything?

___ **4. Do you make** the most of small chunks of time with your child? Ten minutes of chatting about school can reinforce its importance in your middle schooler's mind.

___ **5. Do you ask** family members to pitch in if you have too much to do?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're managing your time with your priorities in mind. For each no, try that idea.

"The key is not to prioritize your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

—Stephen Covey

Maintain key boundaries

It's appropriate to give children more responsibility and freedom as they mature. But middle schoolers also need limits and adult guidance. To provide them effectively:

- **Do not accept rudeness.** Say you will listen when your child speaks respectfully.
- **Maintain a short list** of important rules. Enforce consequences consistently.
- **Recognize the differences** between you. Children lose respect for adults who try to act like children.
- **Make decisions** based on your own adult judgment, not what might make you seem like a "cool parent" to a child.

Source: C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *The Roller Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*, Broadway Books.

Instill organization habits

Being organized can make the difference between doing well in school and sinking. To help your child get organized:

- **Meet together** each Sunday to plan the week ahead.
- **Have your child make** daily checklists of tasks to complete.
- **Suggest checking** your child's school planner before packing up items to bring home or take to school.



Have a goal-setting session

Setting goals helps students stay motivated to learn. Encourage your child to set learning goals for the rest of the year. Help your middle schooler:

- 1. Choose the biggest need** and set a specific, realistic goal for improvement. Have your child write the goal down.
- 2. Plan things to do** to meet it.
- 3. Evaluate progress** every few weeks and make changes if necessary.

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