

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

May 2025

## Support your child's effort to fulfill end-of-year responsibilities

The final months of a middle schooler's year often include tests and year-end projects for multiple classes. Your student may need more encouragement and support from you to manage a heavy workload in the time available.

Here are some ways to help:

- **Reinforce the need to** keep track of key dates. Few students can remember when all of their assignments need to be turned in without writing down due dates. But by spring, many students are out of the habit. Remind your child to write everything down in a planner. Check the planner each day.
- **Emphasize that completing all schoolwork on time** is your middle schooler's top priority. Make it clear that it's not OK to skip some tasks in favor of others. Help your child create a schedule for doing assignments and studying and post it where you both can see it.
- **Encourage your student to jot down reminder notes** during the school day. Writing "bring history notes home" on a sticky note and attaching it to the front of the history notebook increases the chances that your child will remember to bring the notes home.
- **Brainstorm together about ways to limit distractions.** When multiple things are due, students need to make a strong effort to avoid wasting time. Family members can help by limiting interruptions and doing quiet activities while your child works.



## For learning fun, consider a contest

Summer shouldn't be a vacation from learning. But once the demands of school are over, students can choose what to learn about. Entering a contest is one fun way for your child to develop talents and interests.

Entering a contest can also boost your child's:

- **Motivation to excel.** The competitive aspect may spur your child to produce a personal best.
- **Self-confidence.** Emphasize that win or lose, your child will have taken a healthy risk and put forth worthwhile effort.

To find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Contest sponsors will sometimes send materials and entry forms to schools. Teachers or the librarian may know of appropriate contests for students.
- **Search online.** Research contests' rules and sponsors before allowing your child to enter. You should never have to pay a fee or provide financial data to enter.

## Encourage civil discussion

It seems that everywhere these days heated disagreements are dividing people. But respectful, productive debate is possible. Teach your child that when disagreeing with someone, it is important to:

- **Speak** in a polite tone. Sarcasm and disgust won't win anyone over.
- **Listen** to and consider all sides.
- **Search** for common ground.
- **Back up** opinions with facts.

## Prompt your child to write

This summer, help your child experience the pleasure of writing without a deadline. To begin, offer prompts like these:

- Write a poem about your favorite activity or hobby.
- Write about a time when someone helped you.
- Write about something you like about yourself.



Source: J. Schoenberg, "31 Fun Writing Prompts for Middle School," Journal Buddies.

## Promote summer reading

Reading over the summer helps students maintain the "word smarts" they've gained during the year. To encourage daily reading:

- **Lead the way.** Let your child see you choosing to read a novel rather than watch TV or scroll through videos.
- **Show enthusiasm** for reading, even if your child seems uninterested. Your excitement may rekindle your child's interest.
- **Share what you read.** Read a catchy paragraph aloud and pass the book or article on to your child.
- **Recognize** that your child's interests may be changing, and help find reading material that reflects new interests.





## My child wants fewer limits. What should I do?

**Q:** My middle schooler protests that it's not fair when I say "no" to doing what "everybody else does." At 13, my child wants the freedom of an adult. Where should I draw the line?

**A:** Your child has begun to lobby for more independence. And eventually, adolescents must develop independence to become successful adults. However, middle schoolers still need their families' guidance, structure and protection.

To provide these things while helping your child feel more independent:

- **Sit down together** and make a list of decisions your child *can* make alone. These might include choosing when to study (but not whether to study), what to wear, what extracurricular activities to join, and who to be friends with.
- **List things your child can do** to build self-reliance. Stay at home alone for a few hours on a weekend afternoon? Bike to the store?
- **Discuss rules and consequences.** Explain why you make the rules you do—especially when they concern safety. Listen to your child's position. Ask your middle schooler to provide facts to support it.
- **Allow your child to learn** from mistakes. Watching your child fail at something can be painful, but failure can teach important lessons. Ask what your child will do differently when a similar situation comes up.



## Are you ready for your child's social life?

The freedom summer brings from school responsibilities means middle schoolers have more time to hang out with their friends. Are you taking steps to help your child socialize safely this summer? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you met** your child's friends?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you know** how to contact the families of your child's friends? Do you discuss safety rules for your children?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you require** your child to provide key details before you allow a social outing (*what, where, with whom, for how long*)?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you enrolled** your child in some organized, supervised activities, such as summer classes or sports?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you look** into movies and activities beforehand to make sure they are appropriate for your child?

### How well are you doing?

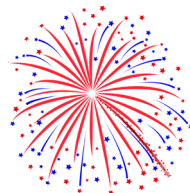
*More yes answers mean you are keeping safety in mind when your child socializes. For each no, try that idea.*

"Friends are the  
sunshine of life."  
—John Hay

## Use the summer to connect

Supporting learning over the summer starts with spending quality time with your child and providing enriching experiences. They don't have to be fancy or expensive. You can:

- **Have a weekly family night.** Play games, cook a meal together and talk.
- **Discuss news and ideas** and ask for your child's opinions.
- **Enjoy summer** family traditions like watching fireworks in the park in July. No traditions? Create some together.
- **Hold family meetings** to discuss plans and solve problems.



## Ease high school anxiety

If your eighth grader is nervous about the move up to high school in the fall, you can help smooth the way in the next few months. Here's how:

- **Visit the new school** together. Call ahead to arrange a tour.
- **Help your child talk** to a current student who is willing to answer questions.
- **Encourage** your child to keep learning and practicing skills in everyday ways over the summer.
- **Be reassuring.** "I know you are going to do well in high school."

## Apply the power of peers

Friends and peers have a lot of influence on middle schoolers' ideas and behavior—and it can be positive! To help your child benefit:

- **Suggest activities** that let your child meet peers who share interests and values, like school-based clubs or volunteering.
- **Invite your child's friends** to spend time with your family.
- **Encourage setting up** a study group with classmates who want to do well.

### Helping Students Learn®

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