

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

MIDDLE SCHOOL



September 2025

Help your middle schooler head into school motivated to learn

Middle school students face more responsibilities and bigger challenges than elementary schoolers. Motivation to learn helps them give school their best effort—and get more out of it. With your encouragement and support now and throughout the school year, your child will be able to start off strong and rediscover motivation when it drops.

To spark a desire to learn and do well in school:



- **Encourage curiosity.** Ask what your middle schooler hopes to learn from a class, an assignment or a reading. Help your child explore outside interests, too. Learning happens everywhere, not just during classes. If your child likes art, for example, check out an exhibit together.
- **Promote organization.** It's tough to stay motivated to study when notes, assignments and quizzes are scattered all over the place. Help your child create a system for sorting and filing schoolwork.
- **Provide positive feedback.** When you see your child working hard, acknowledge it! Celebrate progress. If your child earns a good grade on a project, talk about how effort has paid off.
- **Be patient.** Few people always feel motivated to work, and your child probably won't be consistently gung-ho about school. When your student is less than enthusiastic, offer reminders of strengths and successes.



Share tips from top math students

What strategies do top math students use that can help your student solve tough problems? In a survey, students who participated in a well-known math competition said these habits contributed to their success:

- **Thinking about** the concept behind a problem, as well as memorizing steps. This helps them recognize similar problems.
- **Practicing.** Once they figure out how to solve a type of problem, these students practice the skill by solving similar problems.
- **Minimizing distractions** during study time. Most of the students reported studying alone, and nearly half turn off screens, music and social media.
- **Sticking with it.** When working on a challenging problem, these kids keep trying and use different approaches if one doesn't work. They also seek help from a teacher or go online to find explanations.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week*.

Take attendance seriously

Students who frequently miss class suffer academically, and their absences affect their classmates' learning, too. To show your child that attendance is important:

- **Make it clear you** expect on-time attendance in every class, every day.
- **Schedule appointments** for non-school hours when possible. Limit family trips to school breaks.
- **Don't allow your child** to stay home to miss tests, catch up on sleep or finish schoolwork.



Be consistent about rules

Middle schoolers pay close attention to the way the adults in their lives treat them. Upholding rules consistently shows that you mean what you say and will follow through.

Start the school year off by reviewing the school rules with your child. Make sure you both understand policies regarding safety, testing, homework and grading. If you have questions or concerns, contact your child's teachers or the principal. Then, expect your middle schooler to follow the rules at school as well as at home.

Look deeper at social media

Social media has become a go-to source for news—even for middle schoolers. But it is full of misinformation. Students need to learn to evaluate, not just accept, what they see. Teach your child to ask questions like:

- **Could this photo be fake?** Are there too many fingers or other odd details?
- **Who wrote or posted this?** Is the source credible? Can the facts be verified with other reliable sources?
- **Are the ideas one-sided?** The post may be written to persuade, not inform.





My child is always stressed out. What should I do?

Q: My seventh grader worries about everything—from school-work to current events. How can I help my child manage anxiety and have a happier, more productive school year?

A: The middle school years are full of big changes for students, both physical and academic. It's normal for them to be anxious sometimes. But if constant stress is affecting your child's well-being and learning, it's time to step in. Stressed-out kids often feel like the weight of the world is on their shoulders. So, let your child know you are available to listen and offer support.

Then, help your middle schooler:

- **Identify early warning signs** of anxiety. Some kids grind their teeth or bite their nails when they start to feel anxious. That's when they should take action. Stress is more manageable when it's caught early.
- **Create a plan of action.** If a big task seems overwhelming, for example, your child can break it down into smaller parts.
- **Establish healthy habits.** A healthy diet and adequate sleep can help ease anxiety. Exercise can help your child release tension. Limiting social media exposure may reduce sources of worry.

If your child's anxiety persists or becomes difficult to manage, consult a school counselor or pediatrician.



Are you encouraging honest work?

Some students cheat in school because they believe it's necessary for success, or that it isn't a problem. Others don't even know what they are doing is cheating. Are you reinforcing academic honesty? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** different forms of cheating with your child, such as sharing test questions and passing others' work off as your student's own?
- ___ **2. Do you explain** that using apps, AI and other technology to do work your child is supposed to do is also cheating?
- ___ **3. Do you teach** your child that cheating is *always* wrong?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** about the consequences of cheating (less knowledge, failure on the work or even in the class)?

- ___ **5. Do you emphasize** that learning, not grades, is what matters most to you?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are stressing the importance of doing honest work in school. For each no, try that idea.

"To make your children capable of honesty is the beginning of education."
—John Ruskin

Foster interest in reading

Reading for pleasure every day can improve language skills like fluency and comprehension—and turn your child into a lifelong learner. To instill a reading habit:

1. Designate a daily reading time.

Then, let your child see you use that time to relax with some reading of your own.

2. Make it easy. Keep a wide variety of reading material at home—everywhere your child spends time. Refresh your supply often at the library or by swapping with neighbors and friends.

3. Let your child choose what to read. A graphic novel or an article on a favorite topic may inspire more interest than a classic work of literature—and that's OK.

You can make a difference

By middle school, kids often begin losing interest in achieving in school. But families can turn this around! Here are three ways:

1. Help your child set learning goals.

2. Communicate with teachers.

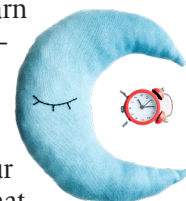
Staying in touch will help you work together to keep your child on track.

3. Emphasize the long-term benefits of doing well and staying in school for your child's future.

Source: N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson, "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," *Developmental Psychology*.

Establish a sleep routine

Middle schoolers need nine to 10 hours of sleep each night to focus, learn and do their best in school—but most don't get it. To make sure your child does, set a regular bedtime with a screen curfew at least an hour beforehand. Then, stick to that bedtime even on weekends, to avoid having to begin again every Monday.



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