

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

MIDDLE SCHOOL



March 2025

## Mental well-being supports your student's ability to learn

In a recent survey of middle and high school students, roughly half of them reported that feeling depressed, stressed or anxious makes learning difficult for them. While occasional sadness and stress is typical for adolescents, persistent negative feelings may present potential problems for your child.

To tune in to your middle schooler's state of mind:

- **Take your child's** "mental temperature" often. Talk together regularly about school, friends and activities. Ask your child, "What was the best thing that happened to you today? The worst?" Look for opportunities for real conversation—in the car, on a walk or at bedtime, etc.
- **Discover influences** in your child's life. Get to know your child's friends, for example. Discuss your student's social media and other online activities, and monitor what your child is seeing online from time to time.
- **Watch for warning signs.** Pay attention if your child loses interest in favorite activities, shows a decrease in energy levels, changes sleeping or eating habits, or starts avoiding family and friends.

If your child's behavior, attitude or mood seem concerning, talk with the teachers, the school counselor or your pediatrician.

Source: "Students Weigh In, Part IV: Learning & Well-Being After Covid-19," YouthTruth.



## Translate science terms into everyday words

Thinking about science in terms of real life can make it more approachable for your child. To introduce your child to the physics that is happening all around us, for example, talk about:

- **Rest.** This is the state of the dirty socks your child leaves on the floor. An object is at rest when it is simply lying still without moving at all.
- **Inertia.** This is your child's state while resisting picking up the socks, despite knowing it is the right thing to do. Inertia is the term for resisting a change from one state to another.
- **Force.** This is what you add when you say the room must be tidied before your child can go out. Force overcomes inertia.
- **Mass.** How hard will your child have to work to tidy up? Objects with less mass, like the socks, are easier to move than more massive objects like books.

Source: D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, Kaplan Publishing.

## Discuss reasons for rules

Middle schoolers want a say in what happens to them, or at least to understand why it's happening. To foster cooperation:

- **Explain the reasons** for your rules. Your child may not realize that a certain rule is to ensure safety, for example.
- **Talk with your child often**—about more than ways to improve. Express interest in your child's opinions and life.

Source: C. Pratt, "Middle School Discipline That Works," Eduguide.

## Travel a new path together

Spending positive time with you builds a vital connection that supports your child's efforts in school. To expand the experience, instead of doing one of *your child's* activities or one of *your* activities together, try one that's new to both of you. It's a wonderful way to see a different side of your child!



## Offer an editing checklist

Editing is an essential part of the writing process. Middle schoolers don't easily accept suggestions for improvement, so help your child learn to edit independently by going through this checklist:

- **I have clearly stated** the main topic of my work in the introduction.
- **My points flow** logically from one to the next.
- **I have supported** my points with relevant examples.
- **I have replaced** vague words with specific ones.
- **I have deleted** unneeded words and repetitive sentences.
- **I have given** credit to all my sources.



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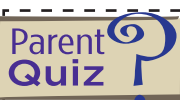


## My child procrastinates. What can I do to change this?

**Q:** My sixth grader always waits until the night before an assignment is due to get started. Often, there isn't enough time left to do a good job. How can I help my child break this habit?

**A:** When procrastination becomes a habit, it can have serious consequences for students. To help your middle schooler address the issue:

- **Find out what's behind it.** Ask why your child puts things off. Some students are afraid of failing. Some like the thrill of dashing something off at the last minute. And others are simply unmotivated. Knowing what is causing the procrastination will help you and your child find solutions.
- **Explain that as students get older,** procrastination causes bigger problems. Say that you are going to help your child change this habit now, before that happens.
- **Have your child create schedules** for completing work. Help your middle schooler divide large projects into smaller parts and set deadlines for each. Your child may still wait until each deadline to finish that part, but bit by bit progress will be made. And once your student has gotten started, it may be easier to keep going.
- **Suggest that your child use small rewards** as motivation, such as taking a ten-minute break after completing a task.



## Are you providing schoolwork support?

A middle schooler's workload is generally a step up from elementary school, with more assignments to do at home. Are you helping your child meet expanding expectations? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you help** your child find a place to study with as few distractions as possible?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** your child's teachers' about homework policies and expectations?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make sure** your child's schedule includes enough time to complete schoolwork?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to use available resources for finding help (school study groups, online videos, etc.)?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you consult** the teachers if your child consistently struggles with schoolwork?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are supporting your student's success with assignments. For each no, try that idea.*

"A little progress each day adds up to big results."

—Satya Nani

## Promote community service

Research links participating in community service with positive outcomes in school and life. Middle schoolers who volunteer:

- **Tend to have** better attendance records and grades, and to stay in school.
- **Feel connected** to the community and positive about their role in it.
- **Develop skills** that help in the classroom, such as leadership, communication problem-solving and dependability.
- **Discover mentors**, such as the heads of organizations or businesses, who can serve as references.

Encourage your child ask a school counselor about sources of volunteer opportunities.

Source: A. Heldt, "The Importance of Community Service in a Teen's Life," The Bridge Teen Center.

## Build your child's resilience

When students are resilient, setbacks don't hold them back. To boost resilience, help your child:



- **Build relationships** at school. Encourage joining clubs or teams. Remind your child that teachers and counselors want to support students.
- **Reframe negative thoughts.** If your child says, "I don't think I could get a part in the play," suggest saying, "I'm going to practice the lines every day until tryouts."

## Reinforce a study routine

Middle schoolers live in the moment. It's hard for them to connect doing something today—like studying for tomorrow's test—with their grades at the end of the term.

To keep your student on the right track, stick with a daily study time at home. Then, when the results are positive, praise your child's diligence. "Your consistent effort on schoolwork is really paying off!"

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

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