

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

September 2024

Daily school attendance is a crucial foundation for learning

Regular school attendance is like a foundation of a house. Missing school creates holes in your child's academic foundation.

Your help is vital to ensure that your child won't experience the negative effects of frequent school absences, such as:

- **Lower grades.** Absent students miss demonstrations, discussions and opportunities for hands-on learning. Most children have trouble keeping up if they miss more than a few days.
- **Fewer friends.** Friendships often get started at school. Frequently absent students have less chance to make and solidify them. And without friends at school, students can lose interest in school altogether.
- **Poor long-term outcomes.** In studies, students who were frequently absent through eighth grade had more employment and financial difficulties in young adulthood, and were less likely to vote and pursue higher education.



Make it clear to your child that attendance matters and is not optional. Don't agree to requests from your child to stay home from school to avoid taking a test, to catch up on sleep or to finish a project. Then, keep track of absences, and contact a school counselor for help if your child consistently resists going to school or if your family faces attendance obstacles.

Source: J. Grabmeier, "School Absenteeism has surprising consequences for adults," Ohio State News.



Set your child up for a productive year

When you support learning in effective ways throughout the school year, you provide a springboard to achievement for your child. Here are five ways to start this year off right:

1. **Show that education** is family priority. Ask questions every day about what your child is learning and doing in school.
2. **Reinforce the importance** of active participation in classes. This means paying attention, taking notes and asking questions.
3. **Encourage curiosity** and creativity. Fill your home with things
4. **Set aside time** for your child to read for pleasure every day.
5. **Start study routines.** Establish a work time, remove distractions, and have your child read or review if no assignments are due.

that stimulate your child's mind—reading material, art supplies, etc. Ask questions about things and then look up the answers.

Manage math frustration

Middle school math can be challenging, and students who have missed basic concepts earlier may become anxious and defensive. If your child is struggling with math work:

- **Ask questions** to help your child figure out what is clear and what is confusing. Then your child will know what to ask in the next class.
- **Have your child** tell you about the concept, rather than the procedure. This may help your student approach the problem in a new way.
- **Ask the teacher** about your child's progress and resources for extra help.



Nurture a drive to strive

When your child takes a positive risk at school, such as trying out for a team or running for student government, the results can be exciting—or painful. Remind your child that trying and effort are things to be proud of, regardless of the outcome. Encourage your child to set new goals to strive for.

Discuss responsible choices

Teachers specialize in helping students learn particular subjects. You can help your child learn to be a better student. One key way is to bolster your child's sense of responsibility.

Talk together about how your child's choices—about big things like following rules and small things like tone of voice or body language—can affect the outcome of different situations. Also, let your child see you take responsibility for your own choices. "I chose to go to bed late and this morning I'm tired. I should have been more responsible."



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How can I give my child a self-confidence boost?

Q: My 13-year-old is very self-critical. This child often says things like, "I can never do anything right!" But that isn't true! How can I help my child see the smart, capable person I see?

A: Self-doubt and insecurity are common at this age. Middle schoolers are feeling the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

To help your child go into this school year with more self-confidence:

- **Look for opportunities** that will allow your child to succeed. Play to your child's strengths. If your middle schooler is athletic, encourage joining a sports team. Creative? Could your child work on costumes for the school play?
- **Give your child responsibilities** at home. You may hear griping from your middle schooler about having to do chores, but they are an effective way to help children feel capable and needed.
- **Be patient when your child makes mistakes.** The messages kids hear from others affect how they feel about themselves. So avoid harsh criticism. Instead, focus on what to do next time.
- **Discourage comparisons.** Remind your child that social media posts, for example, generally show people on their best days. Your child shouldn't compare everyday life to other people's highlight reels.



Are you helping your child adjust?

After the familiarity of elementary school, middle school can seem different and intimidating to new students. Are you helping your child manage this transition smoothly? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child learn about the school? Read the website and school hand-book together.
2. **Do you ask** what your child thinks about classes, teachers and how the year is going?
3. **Do you remind** your child to let you and the teachers know right away if difficulties arise?
4. **Do you plan** to attend school events for families to get information that can help you support your child?

5. **Do you offer** reassurance that while this is a big change, you think it is a positive one?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your middle schooler adapt. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Change can be scary, but you know what's scarier? Allowing fear to stop you from growing, evolving and progressing."

—Mandy Hale

Expect your child's best

What you believe your child is capable of achieving influences your student's performance. Maintain high, realistic expectations. To help your middle schooler meet them:

- **Tell your child often**, "I know you have the ability to do well." Avoid acting surprised when your student succeeds.
- **Show support** during setbacks. Remind your child that they happen to everyone. Offer more encouragement than criticism.
- **Help your child brainstorm** ways to learn from unfortunate events, rather than placing blame on others or bad luck.

Source: W.H. Jeynes, "A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between the Parental Expectations Component of Parental Involvement with Students' Academic Achievement," *Urban Education*, Sage Journals.

Connect with the teachers

A working relationship with the teachers will help you help your child. To create one:

- **Learn** about the teachers' expectations by participating in Back to School Night and parent-teacher conferences.
- **Share** information about your child's strengths and struggles.
- **Contact** the teachers if you have questions, concerns or positive feedback.



Read aloud with your child

Most young middle schoolers are still better at *listening* than they are at *reading*. When you read aloud with your child, you introduce new concepts, ideas and vocabulary. You can:

- **Read the news.** Read an article to your child at breakfast, and have your child read one to you at dinner.
- **Select a book** to read together. Choose a genre that neither of you is familiar with and read for a few minutes each evening.

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