

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

April 2022

Encourage the study habits that lead to math and science success

Math and science are subjects that build on themselves. The things your child is learning now will be the basis for the material he'll study in the future. That's why it's essential for your middle schooler to stay up-to-date with assignments.

To help your child study math and science effectively, encourage him to:

- **Work on these subjects** every day, whether or not he has class.
- **Start each study session** with review before beginning to work on new material. Your child should go over his most recent class notes.
- **Verify his understanding** of the material. After reading a unit chapter, for example, he can look at any sample questions at the end. If he can't answer them, he should reread the text.
- **Make a diagram.** If your child is having trouble understanding a concept or process, a picture can help him see how the pieces fit together.
- **Answer extra questions.** His assignment may be to do the first five problems on a worksheet, or only the even-numbered ones. But if your child tackles all the questions or solves all the problems, he'll get more practice and may start to feel more confident. When he sees similar questions on a test, he'll know that he can answer them.



Provide year-end support

To manage the increased workload that often comes in the final months of the year, your child may need more encouragement and structure from you. To support her:

- **Have her write** out her study schedule and post it where you both can see it.
- **Urge her to make lists**—of assignments, due dates, materials needed, etc.
- **Help her break** large projects down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

There's still time to solve attendance issues

The first rule for doing well in school is a simple one: Attend class. If you discover that your child has been skipping classes, there may also be an underlying problem. To solve it, ask your child what is going on. Then talk to the teachers, and other school staff if necessary. Many attendance issues can be solved when students, families and schools work together.



Teach phone self-control

It's a challenge to manage your child's digital media use if he has direct access on his own phone (as more than half of U.S. children do by age 12). So it's important to help him learn to control it himself. Have your child:

- **Track** the number of times he picks up his phone in a day, and how much time he spends on it.
- **Brainstorm** ways to reduce that time, like turning off notifications.
- **Establish** tech-free times, such as when he's reading and in the hour before bed.



Source: *The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens*, 2019, Common Sense Media Inc.



Prepare for adolescent milestones

As your child matures, it's helpful to be aware of typical milestones children her age reach, and how to offer support. Along with physical and educational changes, your middle schooler may be experiencing:

- **Feelings of insecurity.** Along with more maturity, the preteen years can bring growing self-doubt. Help your child cope with these feelings by praising her progress and successes, and helping her pick herself up and move forward when she stumbles.
- **A need for respect.** Your middle schooler may bristle at being treated like a "little kid."
- **Recognize her growth** by giving her meaningful responsibilities and asking for her opinions. Respect her greater need for privacy—knock before entering her room.
- **A longing for independence.** Expect your child to separate a bit from you as she figures out who she is. She may try on opposing views. Just keep giving her your attention, love and support.



How can I help my child learn to use time wisely?

Q: My child is a pretty good student, but she complains about never having a chance to relax. How can I help her manage her time better so she won't feel so overwhelmed by schoolwork?

A: It sounds like you already know the solution: time management. The better your child is able to master the clock, the less likely she'll be to feel overwhelmed.

To build your child's time-management skills:

- **Have her define** her goal. Ask her to state it clearly. "I want more free time to relax after school." Writing goals down also helps.
- **Make a plan.** To gain more free time, your child will have to do more than wish for it. Together, review how she spends afternoons to see where she can find more downtime. If every day has an extracurricular activity, it may be time to talk about dropping one.
- **Help her create a schedule.** Give your child a calendar or planner. If school is over at 3:00 and dinner is at 6:00, she could write "Work on assignments from 3:30 to 4:00" and "Read from 4:00 to 4:30." This will help her see that she actually has 90 minutes left until dinner—and plenty of time after dinner to finish up or review.
- **Praise progress.** Let her know how proud you are when she uses her calendar to plan ahead instead of getting frustrated.



Are you modeling anger management?

Everyone gets angry from time to time. But left uncontrolled, anger can destroy relationships, hinder learning and worse. Are you showing your child how to manage this strong emotion? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you teach** your child positive ways to vent anger, like exercise and talking it out?
- ___ **2. Do you tell** your child that physical violence is never acceptable?
- ___ **3. Do you set** an example by using healthy strategies to manage your emotions?
- ___ **4. Do you postpone** discussing a conflict with your child until you both are calm?
- ___ **5. Do you listen** more than you talk when you and your child disagree?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to keep anger under control. For each no, try that idea.

"Feelings are much like waves, we can't stop them from coming, but we can choose which one to surf."

— Jonatan Mårtensson

Review paragraph structure

When students know how to build strong paragraphs, they can express their thoughts more effectively. Writing a paper becomes less overwhelming. Go over this construction method with your child:

- 1. Start with a topic sentence** that states the point the paragraph will make.
- 2. Add facts that support** the topic sentence. These details should answer the question *why* or *how*.
- 3. Check to make sure** that each sentence relates to the topic, and that they flow and make sense together.
- 4. Proofread carefully** for spelling and grammar.

Overcome fear of failure

Sometimes, students who experience several failures in a row become so afraid of another that they stop trying new or hard things. This is called *learned helplessness*.

Help your child get past this feeling by trying new study strategies. For example, he could start with an easy task to build up his confidence. Or record himself reading the text and play it back. Encourage him to stay positive and tell himself that he *can* learn.



Peers can be a real plus

Peers have a lot of influence on middle schoolers—and it can be positive! To help your child surround herself with kids who share her interests and your family's values:

- **Encourage participation** in school-based activities and volunteering.
- **Get to know** her friends by inviting them to spend time with your family.
- **Talk with the parents** of your child's friends. Compare rules for your kids.

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