

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

MIDDLE SCHOOL



November 2021

Teach your child that there is no such thing as online privacy

Millions of middle schoolers share their thoughts, photos and videos on social media sites. For adolescents, social media use is as much about self-expression and feeling popular as it is about communicating with friends. Since middle schoolers have yet to develop full impulse control, it's vital for families to be aware of what their children post and to talk with them about what's appropriate.



To help your child use social media wisely:

- **Discuss boundaries.** Has your child seen posts that shared too much? Ask what she thinks is out of bounds. Knowing what she thinks lets you address specific topics instead of just giving a lecture.
- **Talk about online friends and followers.** Unlike real friends, they may not care about your child or want the best for her. Even if she limits access to her posts, people can still share them without her permission.
- **Remind your child that nothing** can ever be completely removed from the internet. She should think carefully before posting anything that would damage her reputation—or someone else's.
- **Connect cyberspace to reality.** Your child may be posting alone in her room, but everything she posts becomes very public. If she wouldn't do or say something in real life, she shouldn't do or say it online.
- **Emphasize safety.** Make it clear that your child should never post anything that would allow someone to locate her in real life. She should never arrange to meet someone she has met online.



Help your child get much needed sleep

The middle school years are a time of physical, academic and social changes for children. And research shows that one thing is critical for students to navigate these changes well: enough sleep.

Lack of sleep decreases your child's ability to handle stress, and increases the chances he'll develop both depression and risky behavior.

Does your child:

- **Fall asleep** within 30 minutes of going to bed?
- **Wake up easily** in the morning?
- **Stay alert all day**—with no reports of inability to focus?

If so, he's probably getting enough sleep. If not, it's time to:

- **Enforce a bedtime** that allows for nine to 10 hours of sleep.
- **Ban late-night screen time** and charge phones and devices outside your child's room.

Source: A. Agostini and C. Centofanti, "Normal Sleep in Children and Adolescence," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, Elsevier.

Study groups have benefits

Studying with others can be an effective way for your child to build on the learning he does on his own. Group study can also build his interactive skills and help him feel supported as he learns. Whether in person or online, effective study groups keep the focus on learning, not socializing. Members take turns leading to prevent one member from dominating the group.

Source: W. Sur and others, "Learning With Others: A Study Exploring the Relationship Between Collaboration, Personalization, and Equity," American Institutes for Research.

Attitude counts in math

Several things that boost math success are more about outlook than numbers. To foster:

- **A sense of well-being**, help your child feel safe making mistakes and taking risks in order to learn.
- **Playfulness**, have fun with math. Act out story problems. Play math games.
- **Passion**, model enthusiasm for math: "I love it when doing math helps me save money."



Source: M. Pearce, "Non-Math Essentials for Learning Math," Edutopia.

Start your child thinking about important choices

Having conversations now about key topics helps prepare your child to make smart decisions about them later. Discuss:

- **Education.** Does your student take learning seriously? Or just try to slide by?
- **Social life.** What makes someone a good friend? Do your child's friends share her values?
- **Health.** Does your child have the facts she needs about diseases, drugs and alcohol?
- **Your relationship.** Does your child feel she can come to you with problems?





Should I relieve my child's self-imposed pressure?

Q: My son is determined to be the best, most popular student and athlete. He doesn't complain, but I worry that he's putting too much pressure and stress on himself. What should I do?

A: A little stress is normal (and usually harmless). Too much, however, can negatively affect your child's health, as well as his performance in school and on the field. To figure out which is the case, ask yourself whether your child is:

- **Always tired** and irritable.
- **Having trouble sleeping** or concentrating.
- **Unhappy with the way** things are.
- **Becoming angry** or self-critical.

A *yes* answer to every statement may indeed mean that your child is putting too much pressure on himself. To help him regain balance:

- **Acknowledge the pressure.** You might say, "I understand how hard you work to do well in each of your classes. It's a real challenge, isn't it?"
- **Adjust his expectations.** Remind your child that no one can be all things to all people, and no one expects him to be.
- **Reset priorities.** Be clear that while doing his best in school is important, learning matters more than grades. Help him rein in other activities.
- **Let him know** that he can come to you when he feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.



Are you encouraging self-reliance?

One of the toughest jobs facing parents of middle schoolers is helping their children begin to learn how to stand on their own. Are you empowering your child to take more control of her life? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you give** your child a say in setting rules and consequences? This helps her learn to negotiate.
2. **Do you teach** your child basic life skills, such as doing laundry and tracking spending?
3. **Do you demonstrate** time management strategies, such as breaking down big tasks and using small bits of time?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to practice presentations for the family? Getting comfortable speaking in front of people inspires confidence.

5. **Do you allow** your child to make lots of decisions within limits you set?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your student become capable and confident. For each no, try that idea.

"Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance."

—T.H. White

Reinforce the relevance of knowledge and skills

Showing your middle schooler how the things he's learning relate to the world outside of school can boost his motivation to learn more. To make the connection:

- **Demonstrate uses.** If he's tackling fractions, you might say, "This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we only have a 1/3 cup measurer. How could we use math to figure out the right amount?"
- **Put his skills into action.** If you make a wrong turn in traffic, for example, have him read the map in a navigation app and see if he can get you back on track.

Three C's spell out respect

Help your child learn that treating others with respect always involves three key C's:

- **Communication.** Respectful people ask for others' views. They listen and try to understand, even when they don't agree.
- **Courtesy.** Respectful people know that *how* they say something matters as much as *what* they say.
- **Consideration.** Respectful people not only listen to others' concerns, they think about them and respond in positive ways.

Bolster homework success

Getting assignments done is your student's responsibility. But you can support her efforts in several ways:

- **Strengthen recall.** Call out vocabulary words or use flash cards with your child.
- **Help her plan.** Have her think about all the steps of a project and schedule time for each.
- **Teach organization.** Help her use calendars, folders, binder tabs and other organizers.



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