MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

September 2021

Empower academic success in fundamental ways from day one

As this new school year gets underway, everyone's focus is on how to meet students' needs and maximize learning opportunities. Your support and involvement right from the start helps ensure that your middle schooler will have the best year possible.



To provide a vital foundation for learning all year long:

- **Ask questions.** Show your child that education is a priority in your family by asking her about what she's doing and learning every day.
- **Offer creative outlets** for your child's curiosity. Keep materials on hand like simple art supplies and library books on interesting topics. Go outside together and explore and observe nature.
- **Encourage pleasure reading.** Reading for fun strengthens the comprehension and vocabulary skills your child will need in her classes. Set aside some time for reading every day.
- **Emphasize the importance** of paying attention. Encourage your child to participate or ask one question in each class every day.
- **Establish schoolwork routines.** Have a set time for study and working on assignments. When your child is doing schoolwork, have her turn off devices not needed for the task at hand. On the days she doesn't have assignments due, suggest that she use the time to read or review.

Encourage editing with a checklist

Middle schoolers are learning that writing is not a "one and done" task. Revising is an essential part of the process. But it's hard for students this age to take criticism of their work and suggestions for improvement from family.

When you read your child's work, be encouraging. Praise a clear description, a well-chosen word, etc. Then, help him figure out what improvements are needed himself. Have him complete this checklist:

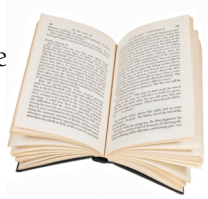
- **I've focused** my writing on one topic or idea and stated it clearly in my introduction.
- **I've supported** my points with examples.
- **I've reread** the piece aloud from beginning to end to see if it makes sense.
- **I've replaced** vague words with specific ones.
- **I've deleted** repetitive sentences.
- **I've checked** to make sure that subjects and verbs agree.
- **I've looked up** the spelling of words I wasn't sure of.

Establish a key partnership

When you team up with your middle schooler's teachers, you increase your ability to effectively address issues that may arise. Learn about teachers' expectations for their students by attending events for families or by scheduling a conference (in person or online). When you do, exchange contact information. Like you, the teachers want to make this a successful year for your child.

Offer estimation challenges

Solving math problems can be a lot like solving life problems. The first step to arriving at a precise answer is often to make an educated guess. In math, that's an estimate. Challenge your child to estimate using ideas from daily life. For example:



- **How much time** will it take her to finish the book she's reading if she reads 10 pages an hour?
- **How many lawns** would she have to mow to earn $1,000 if she makes $18 per lawn?

Then, have her work the problems through and compare her estimates to her answers. Did she get reasonably close?

Display a helpful outlook

Your attitude and expectations have a big effect on your child's school performance. Make three things clear:



1. **You believe** your child can succeed. Never act surprised by good grades. Say, "I knew you could do it!"
2. **Your child has** the power to act. If something unfortunate happens, brainstorm together about how to handle and learn from the situation.
3. **Mistakes aren't the end** of the world. Stay calm if your child messes up. Explain that mistakes can help us grow.

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Q&A How can I stop being the schoolwork police?

Q: When I was at home with my son last year, I had to nag him constantly to do his assignments. But he's a middle schooler now and I've gone back to work. How can I help him take responsibility for schoolwork?



A: Sometimes parents are so eager for their children to meet responsibilities, they take those responsibilities on themselves. But nagging and arguing over schoolwork can backfire. Your son may resist doing assignments because he's upset by your reminders.

To put the responsibility where it belongs:

- **Give your child more control.** Let him have a say in scheduling his study time. Let him decide which assignment to tackle first.
- **Ask him to set learning goals.** You can help make sure they are realistic, but they should be *his* goals.
- **Show that you care** about what your child is learning. Instead of asking "Is your work done?" ask him to tell what it was about.
- **Let your child experience** the consequences when he doesn't do what is necessary. This is an important way kids learn.
- **Build expectations about independence.** Explain to your child that the sooner he demonstrates responsibility about schoolwork, the sooner you'll be able to give him more control in other areas.

Parent Quiz Are you helping your new middle schooler get comfortable?

The unusual realities of school last year may make the move to middle school from elementary school a bigger transition for your child than usual. Are you helping her take it in stride? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Have you helped** your child learn about the school and its procedures by checking out the website?

___**2. Have you discussed** your child's expectations? Pandemic precautions may be necessary for some time, for example.

___**3. Have you reassured** your child that while this is a big change, you think she is ready to handle it?

___**4. Do you ask** your child what she thinks about school, her classes and her teachers?

___**5. Do you urge** your child to tell you and her teachers right way if she is having difficulty?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are supporting your child during this transition time. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"To get somewhere new, we may have to leave somewhere else behind."
—Fred Rogers

Discuss bullies and bullying

Twenty-first century bullies aren't just lunch-money stealing schoolyard toughs. Bullying also includes many non-physical behaviors:

- **Verbal abuse,** such as calling people names and spreading rumors.
- **Social manipulation,** such as getting others to exclude or reject someone.
- **Cyberbullying,** such as posting cruel or embarrassing photos or comments on social media.

Make it clear to your child that bullying is *never* the victim's fault. Discuss the importance of standing up for oneself and others. And if your child experiences bullying, at school or online, encourage him to tell you and report it to an adult at the school.

Focus on attendance now for a better life later

Research shows that school attendance in first through eighth grade affects the quality of students' adult life. In a recent study, young adults who were frequently absent in these early years had more employment and financial difficulties, and were less likely to vote and pursue higher education.

Source: Ohio State University, "School Absenteeism has surprising consequences for adults," ScienceDaily.

Foster balance at home

Stress at home can have a negative impact on students' health and grades. To help keep your whole family emotionally well:



- **Laugh together.** Share jokes, memes and stories.
- **Practice stress-relief.** Take deep breaths, listen to relaxing music, exercise.
- **Share good news.** Every day, have each family member report on one good thing that happened, no matter how small.
- **Lighten the load.** Have a regular family chore time when everyone pitches in.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Alison McLean.
Production Manager: Sara Amon.
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.
Copyright © 2021, The Parent Institute®,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021

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