

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Family and School Partnerships
Fairfax County Public Schools



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Bolster your middle schooler's persistence and determination

The end of the school year often comes with challenges—big projects, presentations, exams. Sometimes, it seems easier to students to give up on a tough task than to push through and complete it. But that won't get them far in life.

Persistence and determination are key for success in school. To encourage your child to see learning challenges through:

- **Point out progress.** Say things like, "You're really coming along with that. If you keep on like this, you'll have something to be proud of."
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** Teach your student to say things like, "I am going to do this" or "I know I can do a great job on this." This kind of self-motivation can reinforce your child's determination to persevere.
- **Set an example.** If you've been putting off a big chore, decide to see it through. Say, "Today, I am going to work until I get this finished."
- **Reward your child's persistence** when a challenging task is complete. You could watch a movie together or make your child's favorite meal. When your middle schooler perseveres through a tough task, it's definitely time to celebrate!



Source: M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.



Make each remaining school day count

Students have a lot of learning left to do in this school year. There is new content to cover and material to review. To encourage and support your middle schooler's best effort through the last day:

- **Prioritize attendance.** Insist that your child attend every class, every day. It's one of the best things students can do to be successful in school.
- **Maintain consistency** by sticking with routines for schoolwork and bedtime. Help your child manage recreational screen activities to allow plenty of time for studying and healthy habits.
- **Help your child choose** and plan for a specific learning goal. You might say, "Science has been a challenge lately. How about committing to 15 extra minutes of studying your notes each night?"
- **Stay engaged.** Monitor your child's assignments, keep reading information that comes from the school and contact teachers if necessary.

Support tech-skill building

The skills students need to use technology effectively go beyond knowledge of computers and apps. Your child will also need:

- **Organization skills**, to decide how to evaluate, sort and use online information.
- **Creativity**, to design effective ways of presenting information.
- **Problem-solving skills**, to troubleshoot when devices aren't working as expected.

Talk about the work your child does online. Ask *why* and *how* and *what if* questions. And if difficulties arise, let your student attempt to solve the problem before you step in.

Remember how you felt?

Sharing your memories of middle school with your child—the challenges, the awkward feelings, what you wish you had done or not done—can help you find common ground and encourage communication. Your child may be more willing to open up if it seems you can relate, and you'll be able to react with understanding.



Plan for a reading summer

Reading often over break will help your child avoid summer learning loss. To bolster reading motivation:

- **Suggest popular titles.** Series by Jeff Kinney and Rick Riordan are popular among middle schoolers.
- **Offer a challenge.** For every book read, your student can earn a treat from you.
- **Lead the way.** Let your child see you reading often.





How can I help my student refocus before next year?

Q: My sixth grader seems to be losing focus. Mood swings and distracted thinking are taking a toll on schoolwork. I'm worried about how my child will cope in seventh grade. What can I do?

A: Physical, emotional and academic changes are part of the move from childhood to adolescence—and they distract many middle schoolers.



To help your child weather the feelings and changes that are common during this transition and thrive in seventh grade:

- **Respond calmly to mood swings.** Your child probably speaks like an adult one minute and fusses like a toddler the next. The more you can keep from getting angry or upset, the better.
- **Keep up expectations and rules.** While it is normal for middle schoolers to test boundaries, that doesn't excuse misbehavior. If your child chooses to slack off on schoolwork or break a rule, reinforce accountability with consistent consequences.
- **Adapt to changes.** Just because your child used to love math or soccer doesn't mean that will always be the case. Ask about new interests. Be reasonable if your child wants to ditch old activities for new ones.

While some moodiness is developmentally appropriate, if negative moods persist or if you see worrying behavior, consult a doctor for help.

Connect and learn together

Family time takes center stage in summer. To promote learning and enjoy your time together:

- **Have a weekly "family fun night."** Cook a new recipe with your child, act out a play or play board games.
- **Follow current events.** Middle schoolers tend to be idealistic and want to "save the world," so they often have strong opinions about what's going on. Listen to your child's thoughts and ideas.
- **Keep up family traditions,** like camping in the backyard or outdoor movie nights. No traditions? Brainstorm with your child and start some.



Establish summer structure

Your child may be looking forward to more freedom this summer, but make it clear that being at home, especially alone, comes with rules and responsibilities. Together, go over:

- **What to do** in an emergency.
- **House rules** and routines, such as "No cooking when home alone" or "Walk the dog between 12:00 and 1:00."
- **Required check-in procedures,** such as calling or texting you at certain times.

For a productive summer, encourage volunteering

When school is out, volunteer work keeps children busy in productive activities and reinforces civic responsibility. Try to match activities to your child's interests. A child who loves to read could read to a younger child or elderly neighbor. A student who cares about the environment could organize a clean-up of a local park. To find more ideas, visit kidsthatdogood.com.



Are you thinking ahead to high school?

Your child's time in middle school is short, and high school is around the corner. Are you helping your student get ready for the next step in education? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you foster** your child's organizational skills, such as writing assignments in a planner and regularly tidying papers and supplies?
2. **Do you help** your child establish positive study habits, such as reviewing material or practicing skills each day?
3. **Do you show** that you take education seriously and expect your child to do the same?
4. **Do you keep** track of your child's social life and emphasize the need to avoid unsafe and inappropriate activities?
5. **Do you encourage** open communication and offer your child support and guidance?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are preparing your child to grow as a student and a person. For each no, try that idea.

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

—Satya Nani

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