

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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Encourage your child to approach problem-solving step-by-step

"I forgot to take my make-up test." "I don't have enough time to finish my project." To become responsible students, middle schoolers need to learn to solve more of the problems that crop up for themselves.

This will seem less daunting to your child—and he'll have more success—if you teach him a process for approaching problem-solving. The next time he faces a sticky situation, help him take these six steps:

- 1. Define the problem.** What is it your child needs to do or decide? What does he already know about this issue?
- 2. Gather information.** If your child is dealing with something he hasn't run into before, he may need to find out more before he can decide what to do.
- 3. Brainstorm options.** Have your child list as many possible solutions as he can, without getting bogged down in analyzing each idea.
- 4. Consider pros and cons.** Once he has a list of potential solutions, he can think about the possible positive and negative consequences of each option. Which seems like the strongest choice?
- 5. Make a plan of action.** You can offer guidance if your child is unsure how to proceed, but let him follow the plan himself.
- 6. Evaluate.** Is his plan helping him solve the problem? Great! If not, discuss what he's learned and suggest that he go back to step 4 and try again.



Engage in positive ways

To be an effective partner in your child's learning, keep two things in mind:

- 1. It's OK to say "I don't know."** If your child comes to you with a question you can't answer, you can just say, "I never learned that. Let's take a look in your book."
- 2. All kids have strengths** and weaknesses. Support and encourage your child in every class, but don't expect the same performance in every subject.

Counselors help students move forward

School counselors are playing a critical role in helping students and families cope with the pandemic's effects. Not only can they help kids get back on track academically after facing problems, counselors are also trained to help with: solving problems with friends, strengthening coping skills, dealing with grief, and connecting with outside experts and agencies to help you find support.



Discuss reasons for honesty

Honesty is essential for academic success. Cheating is not only wrong, it also won't help your child learn or get smarter. Remind your child of honesty's benefits:

- **Honest people** never have to worry about being caught in a lie. They have self-respect.
- **Honesty** keeps people out of trouble.
- **Parents and teachers** tend to give more freedom and privileges to students they know are honest.
- **Teachers**, family members and friends respect people they can trust to be honest.



Suggest ways to strengthen memory

Your child's long-term memory is the store of knowledge she will draw on in school and all her life. Several study strategies can help her boost her ability to recall what she's learning. Encourage your child to:

- **Consider the context.** If an upcoming test is on Chapter Four, for example, looking at the summaries of surrounding chapters can help her see how Chapter Four relates to the whole unit.
- **Test herself.** Your child can put small chunks of material on flash cards. Then she can review them frequently and use them to practice recalling the information.
- **Make the material relevant.** Perhaps she can watch a TV show or video on events she's studying in history, or visit a historic site from the same era.
- **Study and then sleep.** While your child's body gets much needed rest, her brain will still be working on sorting and retaining the material she studied right before bed.



My child seems so down on herself. What can I do?

Q: My eighth grader complains that she can't do anything right, which isn't true at all. How can I convince her that she's a smart, capable person?

A: Middle schoolers are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up. It can be scary when they feel like they are falling short. This fear can lead to merciless self-criticism.

You may not be able to make your child's insecurity vanish, but you can help her see how smart and competent she is. To boost her self-image:

- **Trust her** with responsibilities. She may not like having to feed the dog or water the plants, but have her do it anyway. Let her know she is counted on by the whole family.
- **Put her in situations** where she's likely to succeed. If she is a strong math student, could she tutor a younger child? If she's creative, could she make and sell a craft as a charity fundraiser?
- **Point out her accomplishments.** Show her that you notice when she does something well, whether it is earning a good quiz grade or making a beautiful holiday centerpiece.
- **Talk about social media.** Remind her not to compare her day-to-day life with posts that show other people on their best days.



Parent Quiz

Are you planning for afternoon safety?

The afternoon hours right after school are when unsupervised students are most likely to get into trouble. Are you safeguarding your child's after-school time if you can't be with him? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extracurricular activities?
- ___ **2. Do you maintain** contact with your child by phone?
- ___ **3. Do you make sure** that your child has a nearby adult he can turn to, such as a relative or neighbor?
- ___ **4. Do you discuss** dangerous situations and ways your child can avoid them?
- ___ **5. Do you establish** guidelines for your child while he is home alone: responsibilities

to carry out and rules for what to do and not do?

How well are you doing?

Each yes answer means you are taking an important step to ensure your child's safety and productivity after school. For each no, try that idea.

"What all children deserve, and all of us want, is safety, love and possibility."

—Alan Robert Neal

Do an attendance review

Winter break is a great time to review the first part of the year and make plans for the next. Looking at your child's class attendance should be part of this process. If absences are mounting up:

- **Make it clear** that on-time attendance in every class is a priority.
- **Set consequences.** Explain that skipping classes erodes your trust. So you will have to limit your child's independence.
- **Emphasize the need** for healthy habits to stay well and in school.
- **Work with the school** if your child faces obstacles to class attendance.

Find a screen sweet spot

What is the right limit for recreational screen time? A recent study of middle schoolers found that students who played online for four or more hours daily on weekends were four times more likely to skip school than those who didn't. On the other hand, those who consumed less than one hour per day were less bored and did better in school.

Source: Rutgers University, "Young teens should only use recreational internet and video games one hour daily," ScienceDaily.

Read aloud regularly

Young middle schoolers are often better at listening than they are at reading. When you read aloud to your child, you expose him to new concepts, ideas and vocabulary. The key is to keep it short and to the point. You can:

- **Read a news article** at breakfast.
- **Share a taste** of something you are reading.
- **Choose a type** of book your child doesn't usually read—a biography, for example. Take turns reading it aloud for a few minutes a day.



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