

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Cranford Burns Middle School
Mobile, AL



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Give your child writing prompts and encourage summer journaling

Journaling is a low-pressure way for students to keep writing skills sharp over the summer break. No one has to see what they've written, and they can explore their ideas and stretch their creativity.

To get the ball rolling, ask a question each day that requires your child to think. Or share a few of these writing prompts suggested for middle schoolers:

- **If you could solve** any problem in the world, what would it be?
- **What three values** are important to your family?
- **Would you rather jump** out of a plane or go scuba diving? Why?
- **How would your best friend** describe you?
- **What is your favorite way** to be creative?
- **Why should people show** respect to others?
- **What is the most** important thing in your life? Why?
- **What did you do** to achieve a goal you recently reached?
- **If you could live** inside any game, which would you choose? Why?
- **What school or house rule** would you like to replace? Why?



Source: J. Schoenberg, "31 Fun Writing Prompts for Middle School," Journal Buddies.



Take steps to ease high school anxiety

The move up to high school makes many middle schoolers nervous. If this is true for your child, use the next few months to ease the transition. Take these steps to eliminate fears and help your student feel ready:

- **Tour the new school.** There may be a special day planned for eighth graders to visit. If not, call and ask if it is possible for your child to take a live or virtual tour while school is in session.
- **Get the inside scoop** by talking with current students. Urge your child to ask questions like "What do you wish you had known before starting high school?"
- **Put skills into practice.** Have your child read, review class notes and rework math assignments over the summer. Feeling competent helps students feel confident.
- **Spark excitement** by having your child check out the school's extracurricular activities on its website or in the yearbook.
- **Offer reassurance.** Tell your child, "You've got this!"

A strong finish takes focus

Students facing heavy year-end workloads may be tempted to skip some tasks in favor of others. Remind your child that completing *all* assigned work on time is still the top priority. Together, brainstorm ways to limit distractions. To get everything done before school is out, students need to make a strong effort to avoid wasting time.



Discipline in positive ways

Middle schoolers often tune out things they don't want to hear, like scolding. To encourage positive behavior, speak pleasantly to your child. Make it a point to:

- **Praise** the things your child does right.
- **Ask** politely when you want your child to do something. Say *thank you* afterward.
- **Phrase** reminders in positive terms. Instead of saying "No, you can't do that until your room is clean," say "Yes, as soon as your room is clean."

Spend time on life skills

Having too much time on their hands isn't good for active middle schoolers. Here are a few ideas to help keep your child busy with meaningful learning when school lets out:

- **Consider a summer job.** Is your child ready to earn some money outside your home? Pet care, babysitting or yard work can help kids learn responsibility.
- **Teach your child to cook.** At least once a week, help your middle schooler prepare a simply meal for your family.
- **Assign a research project.** Want to find the best price and model of a product? Ask your child to research online and report on the options.





Where is the line between helping and pushing?

Q: After some ups and downs as a student, my eighth grader is getting his act together now. I want to be sure his good habits are strongly established before high school. What can I do to keep him on track without pushing too hard?

A: You are right that it is important to know when to pull back and let your child take some steps forward on his own. Micromanaging him now could backfire. To help your student continue on a positive path:



- **Acknowledge his effort.** Tell your child how proud you are of the changes he's made. "I can see you are really working hard to turn your assignments in on time. It's terrific that you are being so responsible." He may act like it's no big deal, but your approval likely means a lot to him.
- **Steer clear of backhanded compliments.** When you're praising your child's good habits, don't bring up past bad ones.
- **Provide unspoken support** for your child's new study habits. When he hits the books, do some quiet work or reading of your own. If he's sitting up at his desk instead of sprawling on his bed, be sure his lamp is bright and his pencil cup is well-supplied. If he's planning his time better, give him a big calendar for his wall to help him keep track.



Are you planning for a safe summer?

Friends and social activity are a high priority for middle schoolers—especially in the summer. Safety is a priority for their parents. Are you ready to help your child socialize safely this summer? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** COVID precautions with your doctor?
- ___ **2. Do you know** your child's friends? Are you in contact with their families? Do you agree on health and safety rules for your children?
- ___ **3. Do you ask** about your child's plans before you allow a social outing (what, where, with whom and for how long)?
- ___ **4. Have you looked** into organized summer activities for your child, such as camps and volunteering?
- ___ **5. Do you research** activities to make sure they are appropriate before your child attends?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are prioritizing the safety side of social activity. For each *no*, try that idea.

"A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Encourage summer reading

Students who don't read over the summer risk losing some of the skills they've gained this year. To promote daily reading:

- **Set an example.** Let your child see you choosing to read in your free time. Be enthusiastic about reading, even if your middle schooler isn't.
- **Respect changing interests.** Topics your child used to love may not be as captivating these days. Look for books that reflect your child's current interests.
- **Sample some young adult books** yourself. You may get a better feel for what topics may interest your child. Ask a librarian for suggestions.

Promote civil discussions

Everywhere today, heated disagreements are dividing people. But respectful disagreement is possible. Teach your middle schooler that in an argument, it is important to:

- **Use a pleasant tone.** Sarcasm and disgust won't win anyone over.
- **Look for common ground.**
- **Back up opinions with facts.**
- **Keep listening to all sides.**

Bolster parent-child bonds

Studies have shown that despite adolescents' longing for independence, the steady physical presence of their parents has a positive effect on their emotional health. You don't have to do fancy things to connect with your child. This summer:

- **Share** simple activities. Take a walk. Tackle a home-improvement project.
- **Tell** family stories.
- **Show** that time together is a priority for you. Block it out on the calendar.



Source: L. Damour, "What Do Teenagers Want? Potted Plant Parents," *The New York Times*.

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