

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Give your middle schooler the formula for math test success

Your child may be unsure about how to study for math tests. After all, there aren't any dates to remember and it's hard to predict the specific problems the teacher might include. But there *are* strategies for math study that will help him do his best.

Before a test, encourage your child to:

- **Stay up to date with assignments.** Then he can study without having to learn new material first.
- **Practice.** Have him re-solve problems from past assignments and quizzes. He should focus on the types of problems he had trouble understanding or got wrong until he is confident he can solve them.
- **Create formula flash cards.** He can put each formula or process he'll need to know on a flash card and quiz himself.

Remind your child that during the test, he should:

- **Write down memorized formulas** before starting to answer questions.
- **Use estimation.** If one step in a problem asks him to subtract 32 from 109, he can estimate that the answer should be around 80. So if he gets 17, he should realize he's made an error and try again.
- **Double-check his work.** He can rework any problem he's uncertain about and look for careless errors, like misplaced decimal points.



Adapt rules, but not your approach

Middle schoolers are not all alike. And your child may be changing so much that she seems like a different person from one minute to the next. So it's not surprising that there's no one method of discipline that fits all kids this age.

Even so, you can apply a consistent approach to discipline while adapting to your child's changing needs. Here's how:

- **Keep your emotions** under control. Avoid disciplining your child when you're angry. Compose yourself first.
- **Consider your child's** emotions. If she's upset, let her calm down (or at least acknowledge

her feelings) before imposing any consequences.

- **Listen.** Don't let your child talk her way out of a consequence. But demonstrate respect by hearing her out even as you enforce it.
- **Don't budge** on non-negotiable rules about things like safety and substance abuse.

Source: S. Brown, *How to Negotiate with Kids ... Even When You Think You Shouldn't*, Penguin.

SEL helps students thrive

Educators talk a lot about the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL). This kind of learning isn't academic, but it improves academic outcomes. To foster SEL at home, help your child boost his:

- **Self-awareness.** Help him explore his feelings, motivations, strengths and limits.
- **Self-management.** Share tips for controlling mood and behavior.
- **Social awareness.** Model consideration for other peoples' points of view.
- **Relationship skills.** Help him think through what he can do to improve his rocky relationships.
- **Responsible decision-making.** Help him consider consequences of his actions.

Boost your child's resolve

Making learning resolutions can reenergize your child's motivation. Suggest areas like:

- **Reading.** Could she resolve to add 15 minutes of pleasure reading to her bedtime routine?
- **Writing.** She could strengthen her skills by making daily entries in a journal.
- **Projects.** Encourage a resolution to plan each step and get an early start.



Make time alone enjoyable

Current conditions mean that normally social students are spending much more time on their own. Remind your child that he is a worthwhile person and can be happy in his own company. Help him enrich his time alone with:

- **Artistic** or creative pursuits.
- **Exercise.**
- **Cooking.**
- **Daydreaming.**





My child clams up about problems. What should I do?

Q: It's clear that something is troubling my seventh grader, but she won't talk about it. Should I respect her privacy? If not, how can I make her confide in me?

A: Adults aren't the only ones who have been stressed in the past year. And while adolescents are famously reluctant to share problems with parents, you should keep trying to find out why your child is upset. Even if the issue is minor, if it drags on for days or weeks it can affect her health and her schoolwork.

To draw her out without pressuring her:

- **Express your concern.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about anything. It's my job to help you figure things out."
- **Establish expectations.** "I respect the fact that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to think it over, but let's try to figure this out together after dinner."
- **Seek support.** If your child still refuses to talk, contact her doctor, school counselor, coach or other trusted figure in her life. Work together to help your child unburden herself and move forward.



Do you encourage school success choices?

Middle school is an ideal time for your child to learn that he can make choices that will improve his future. Are you helping your middle schooler make positive academic choices? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you encourage** your child to take the most rigorous courses he can manage?
2. **Do you talk** with your child about the importance of reading to learning?
3. **Do you watch** the news with your child and encourage him to take an interest current affairs? This can boost his knowledge of civics and history.
4. **Do you urge** your child to take a foreign language in middle school if possible?

5. **Do you discuss** ways your child's interests might mesh with classes or a future career?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child make choices that will benefit him in the future. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"Choices are the hinges of destiny."
—Edwin Markham

Overcome study hurdles

Every child has her own challenges when it comes to studying. Some issues, however, are common to many students. If your child:

- **Has trouble remembering** what she reads, have her make an outline. She can group material with common threads together. Then she can study the material group by group.
- **Has studied**, but lacks confidence in her knowledge, have her make a practice test. She can write questions about the key topics, then answer them.
- **Has waited until the last minute** to study for a chapter test, have her read the introduction and the summary, and review the key terms and any questions at the end of the chapter.

Encourage deeper thinking

When writing about literature or history, students need to support their ideas with relevant examples. Help your child clarify his thinking by asking questions like:

- **Which piece of information** helped him most when forming his opinion or conclusion? Why?
- **Which ideas** did he discard? Why?
- **Can he think** of anything that might change his mind?

Source: L. Chesser, "50 Questions to Help Students Think About What They Think," Teachthought, niswc.com/thinkwrite.

To curb back talk, model a respectful tone

Sometimes, statements that seem dismissive or disrespectful are a middle schooler's attempt to show you that her opinion differs from yours. Let your child know that she is allowed to disagree, but she needs to express her opinion appropriately. Show her how by restating her point using a respectful tone.



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