

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Westside Middle School  
Rocky Face, Georgia



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## Point to successful, relatable role models to boost interest in STEM

Role models can inspire students to achieve. A recent review of research on boosting interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) breaks down qualities that make role models effective. To provide role models and spark interest in STEM subjects and careers:



- **Look for biographies** of diverse, successful people in a variety of fields: space exploration, coding, oceanography, engineering, cybersecurity, paleontology, etc. Encourage your child to learn more about people who sound interesting.
- **Share examples from the news.** Show your middle schooler articles or videos featuring people who discover cures for diseases or engineer self-driving cars, for example.
- **Find real-life role models.** Have your child talk to a college student majoring in a STEM field, such as a neighbor or cousin. At the doctor's office, point out that doctors, nurses and lab technicians studied STEM topics and use what they learned every day.
- **Make connections** between your child and the role model. Are your families from the same background? Does the role model also work hard at math or love music like your child does? Seeing role models as "just like me" or "regular people" can make their accomplishments seem within reach to your child.

Source: New York University, "Which role models are best for STEM? Researchers offer recommendations in new analysis," ScienceDaily.



## Encourage healthy food choices

Nutrition makes a difference to learning. Students who eat a healthy diet are better able to stay alert in class and retain what they learn. Middle schoolers make a lot of food choices, and they need to learn to make responsible ones.

To help your student become an informed eater:

- **Expose your child** to a variety of foods. Plan your weekly meals together and set a goal of trying one new healthy food each week.
- **Read nutrition labels** with your child. How many servings of chips are in that bag? If it's more than one, have your child multiply the fat and salt content by the number of servings. If your child eats the whole bag, is it a healthy choice?
- **Don't forget water.** Hydration is key to brain function. Give your child a water bottle to drink from throughout the day.
- **Insist that your child** eat breakfast, at home or at school.

## Add to prior knowledge

Having *prior knowledge* of a topic makes it easier for your child to understand reading that relates to it. To grow your student's base of knowledge:



- **Encourage your child** to read news articles on a wide variety of topics.
- **Watch educational shows** together.
- **Visit historic sites** as a family.
- **Talk about your own experiences.**

## Chart a path to the future

One of the most effective ways you can boost academic achievement is to help your child understand the link between education and dreams for the future.

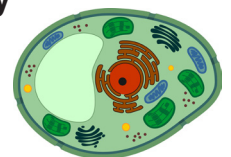
Does your child want to be an architect? Mechanic? Fashion designer? Together, investigate the education or training required. Look for schools that offer the necessary programs. Remind your child that while dreams may change, a solid education is a ticket to achieving life goals.

Source: D. Viadero, "Scholars: Parent-School Ties Should Shift in Teen Years," Education Week.

## Preparation gets results

Effective preparation is a sure route to test success. Teach your middle schooler to:

- **Schedule plenty of study time,** starting on the day the test is announced.
- **Create a list** of key facts and concepts.
- **Break material down** into chunks and study one chunk at a time.
- **Use multiple study strategies.** Your child could teach you the material, create a diagram or model of concepts, and make and take a practice test.
- **Save the last day** of studying for review, not learning new concepts.





## How can I discourage copying friends' behavior?

**Q:** My middle schooler has become friends with some kids who are rude and even mean to others. My child thinks these kids are funny. I don't want my child to act this way—what can I do?

**A:** Peer influence is strong in these years. To balance it, start a conversation about friendship with your child—without mentioning particular people. What does your child like about hanging out with school friends? What do they like to do together? What values do they share? How do they make your child feel?

It may be that these friends make your child feel more mature or appealing. Or perhaps your child isn't totally comfortable with the way they act, but isn't sure what to do about it. To encourage positive social behavior:

- **Avoid criticizing your child's friends.** Belittling them may make your child feel the need to defend them.
- **Ask guiding questions.** "It sounds like Morgan was pretty rude to the teacher today. How did that behavior make you feel?"
- **Talk about humor.** Say that no matter how clever a comment may seem, if it is rude or hurtful, it isn't funny—and it isn't OK. Explain that social interactions can be tricky, and you will help your child figure them out.
- **Set boundaries.** If you have real misgivings about your child's friends, supervise when your child spends time with them outside of school.



## Are you encouraging frequent reading?

Pleasure reading helps students enlarge vocabulary and gain comprehension skills. Are you encouraging your middle schooler to make time for reading every day? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you established** a regular family reading time?
2. **Do you put** interesting reading materials in every room of your home?
3. **Do you share** articles and books on topics that might interest your child?
4. **Do you read** in front of your child and talk about what you're reading?
5. **Do you involve** your child in activities that require reading, such as cooking or building things from instructions?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are making reading a fun and frequent activity at home. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

"I read for pleasure and that is the moment I learn the most."

—Margaret Atwood

## Put emotions to work

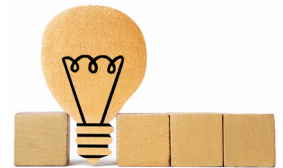
Is your child acting silly one minute and feeling overwhelmed the next? Brain research shows emotional thinking develops earlier than rational thinking. To engage your child's emotions for learning:

- **Share funny cartoons,** videos and memes about learning topics.
- **Make it personal.** If the topic is the Revolutionary War, you might ask "Can you think of a time when you felt like revolting against authority?"
- **Encourage imagination.** Ask questions like "What would it have felt like to start a new country?"

Source: T. Armstrong, Ph.D. *The Power of the Adolescent Brain: Strategies for Teaching Middle and High School Students*, ASCD.

## Tutoring: what to expect

Many schools and families are turning to tutors to help fill in pandemic learning gaps. If your child is working



with a tutor, it's important to establish realistic expectations. Together, set small, short-term goals for your child. Meeting them is a good sign that the tutoring is working. If your child isn't meeting goals after a few months, consult with the school counselor about possible next steps.

## Ease high school nerves

Is high school the next step for your child? Start now to smooth the transition. Here's how:

- **Build excitement** about high school opportunities: new friendships, more freedom, a broader range of classes.
- **Connect with resources.** School counselors and current high school students can answer many questions.
- **Express pride.** Your child is about to reach a huge milestone!

### Helping Students Learn®

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