MIDDLE SCHOOL

September 2026

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Adirondack Central School District

Help your child move forward on the path to independent learning

Middle school students are stepping up to the next level of education. In these years, they are expected to take increased responsibility for their own learning. This responsibility takes many forms.

To help your child meet the challenge, encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Be an active participant.** Asking and answering questions and expressing ideas in class will give your child a better understanding of the material.
- **Go beyond memorizing.** Knowing a list of facts won't help if your child doesn't understand why they matter. Help your child really think about the material. For example, your student should consider questions like, "How does this relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"
- **Ask for help as soon as difficulties occur.** This keeps small problems from growing into major struggles. Have your child find out about teachers' availability and other resources for extra help. Your student should think about what might help and ask for it.
- **Take challenging classes.** If all your middle schooler's classes are easy, they may not be the right ones for your child. Together, consult your child's counselor about options.

Encourage your child to read actively

Understanding complex reading material is a challenge for many middle schoolers. It involves reading and thinking about the meaning of individual words and also the ability to think about the meaning of the text as a whole.

Active reading strategies help students strengthen comprehension. Encourage your child to:

- **Take reading notes.** Taking notes helps students stay engaged with reading. Your child can also write brief sticky note summaries to mark key places in the text.
- **Think about vocabulary.** The fiction and nonfiction your child is assigned probably includes unfamiliar words. On hitting one, suggest that your child look up the definition and write it on an index card. Encourage your child to note *prefixes* (beginning parts of words) and *suffixes* (ending parts) that may appear in related words.
- **Build fluency** and a base of knowledge by reading for pleasure.

Source: "Middle School Reading: Improving Your Seventh and Eighth Grader's Reading Comprehension," American Library Association.

Get off to a strong start

Start the school year by expressing confidence in your child's ability to make this the best year yet. Then, help your child invest in success by setting goals in areas such as:

- **Reading.** Your child could plan to strengthen skills and start by reading for 15 minutes each night before bed.
- **Assignments.** Your child could aim for completing and turning in all work on time. Establishing a daily study time is a helpful first step.
- **Time management.** Eliminating procrastination is a worthy goal. Review upcoming tasks weekly and help your child schedule time to complete them.

Adapt to physical changes

Adolescents' bodies are going through a lot of changes. The impulses that accompany them can be distracting during study time. If your child often gets up to wiggle or snack:

- **Suggest standing up** while working.
- **Schedule "stretch"** breaks every 30 minutes.
- **Offer sliced veggies** your child can munch while working.

Pay attention to attendance

Students who attend every class have an advantage over those who don't. They benefit from explanations, demonstrations and chances to ask questions that absent students miss. To show that attendance matters:

1. **Don't allow** your child to stay home for vague complaints or to catch up on sleep.
2. **Find out why** if your child is avoiding school or a class.
3. **Seek help** from a school counselor to overcome attendance obstacles.

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Q&A My child is not a morning person. How can I help?

Q: Middle school starts early. We've set a bedtime, but my child is still waking up exhausted and cranky. This can't be good for learning. What should I do?

A: Lack of sleep night after night can add up to attitude and attention issues that make learning a struggle. But there are several things you can do to help your child get enough sleep:

- **Maximize bedtime effectiveness.** Middle schoolers need eight to 10 hours of sleep to function well. With your child, count backward eight hours from wake-up time. Then, make bedtime 20 minutes earlier to allow time to fall asleep. Adjust as needed until your child wakes up easily.
- **Help your child ease into "sleep mode."** Turn all digital devices off one hour before bedtime and store them outside your child's room at night. Help your child create a relaxing bedtime routine.
- **Check in.** Could anxiety be keeping your child awake? Stop by for a bedtime chat. Let your middle schooler unload, then finish the conversation by bringing up something your child did well that day.
- **Discourage long naps** and caffeinated drinks. Both can interfere with your child's ability to fall asleep at night.

Parent Quiz Are you setting the stage for success?

The habits middle schoolers establish and the choices they make can have positive or negative effects on academic outcomes. Are you helping your child make choices that support achievement? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you demonstrate** the importance of reading, and encourage your child to read often?
2. **Do you recommend** that your child choose challenging classes—especially in topics of interest?
3. **Do you share** news stories with your child and build awareness of current events and history?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to study a foreign language, starting in middle school if possible?
5. **Do you help** your child discover ways current interests might translate into a career?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are encouraging actions that lead to success. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"We start our journey to our dreams by wanting, but we arrive by focusing, planning, and learning."
—Christina Wodtke

Note-taking is a study aid

"The teacher provides outlines, so why should I take notes in class?" Share these two good reasons with your child:

1. **Taking class notes** helps students remember what the teacher said.
2. **Class notes become** a helpful study guide.

Then, remind your child to:

- **Take notes** by hand, not on a computer.
- **Listen for** and write down names, dates, times of events and other key details.
- **Review notes** daily and clarify them while the memory of class is fresh.

Put dislike into perspective

Students don't always like teachers who assign regular homework or give hard tests. If your child expresses dislike for a teacher:

- **Ask for specifics.** What does the teacher say or do that inspires this feeling?
- **Avoid taking sides.** If an issue needs addressing, contact the teacher. Hear the teacher out and work out a plan together.
- **Remind your child** that liking teachers isn't necessary to learn from them. It may just take determination and hard work.

Start a safety conversation

One important way families can bolster school safety is to talk often with their students about what's going on at school and in their lives. To get the ball rolling, talk with your child about:

- **School rules** and the reasons for them. Say you expect your child to follow them.
- **School safety** and security procedures. If you don't know what they are, ask.
- **The importance of telling** an adult if your child sees or experiences something that doesn't seem right.

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