

Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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Help your middle schooler bolster characteristics that aid learning

Reading, writing and math skills are not the only things that drive academic achievement. Students who develop certain personal traits and apply them to their studies do better than those who don't. To support this development in your child, encourage her to be:

- **Curious.** Curious students don't accept "just because" as an answer. They want to know things. Stoke your child's curiosity by exposing her to new ideas and experiences.
- **Persistent.** Persistent students set goals and work diligently toward them. They keep trying until they master material. Praise the planning, effort and determination your child puts into studying; don't focus solely on grades.
- **Resilient.** Everyone fails sometimes, but resilient students don't let setbacks derail them. Encourage your child to take responsibility for her actions and create a plan for improvement.
- **Open-minded.** Students who listen to the opinions of others and engage in constructive conversations with classmates gain insight and deeper understanding. Listen to your child's ideas and opinions, and help her consider all sides of an issue.
- **Organized.** Show your child how to use tools to manage her schoolwork and her time, such as calendars, sticky notes and file folders.



Practice categorizing with your child

Many of your child's classes will require him to recognize central ideas and make associations. Categorizing is a critical step. Your child can figure out a lot once he knows what something is and where it fits in.

Here is an example of how you can help your child build this skill:

- **Show your child an item,** such as a ring. Ask him, "What is this?" He will probably say, "It's a ring."
- **Ask your child,** "Can you put this item in a category?" He is likely to reply, "It's jewelry."
- **Now ask him,** "What else can you tell me, now that you've

established that this is a ring and a piece of jewelry?" Brainstorm some other ways to categorize the ring with your child. Some ideas to get him started include: "It's valuable." "It's something that should be kept in a safe place." "It's something that can be worn as a symbol of marriage or other commitment."

Source: D. Johnson and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, Kaplan Publishing.

Brains need rest to learn

Is your child frequently irritable or tired? Even with more time at home, many students aren't getting the nine or 10 hours of sleep they need. Help your child:

- **Adjust** her schedule so she can complete schoolwork by early evening.
- **Re-establish** a relaxing, screen-free bedtime routine and a regular bedtime.



Give your child things to think about while reading

Middle schoolers are learning to analyze the things they read. This takes thought. As your child reads, encourage him to identify:

- **The main idea.** How does the writer get it across? What details support it?
- **The author's intent.** Was it to entertain the reader? To inform or influence?
- **Relationships** between events in the text and the outcome.
- **How the characters'** feelings affected their decisions.
- **The meaning** of figurative language. "Her heart *froze*," means she was scared, not that her heart was icy cold.

Source: ACT, "For Middle Schoolers: Activities to Build College-Level Reading Skills," AdLit.org, nswc.com/read-comp.

Put discipline in writing

If your child resists rules and loves to argue, consider creating a written discipline plan. Together, identify your five most important rules and the consequences for breaking them. Allow your child some input, but remind her that you have the final say. Then, instead of being drawn into an argument, you can just point to the plan. Review and revise the plan as your child shows she can stay within boundaries.



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How can I convince my child to care about school?

Q: My son is doing OK in his classes this year, but he isn't working up to his potential. He says "School's really not that important." How can I change his mind?

A: The connection between education and achievement is well-established. But like many other kids, your child may be absorbing the opposite message from:

- **Pandemic compromises.** Most schools simply could not operate safely in all the usual ways this year. Virtual and hybrid learning, and the absence of other school activities, have many kids feeling disconnected. Remind your child that this won't last forever, and that it's important to make the most of what is available.
- **Rags-to-riches success stories.** These are media favorites. The clincher is often that the person abandoned school. Tell your child that these stories make news because they are extremely rare.
- **Family frustration.** Parents are under a lot of pressure juggling work, home and school priorities. But if you complain about having to look over your child's schoolwork or help him with a project, your child may be getting messages you don't intend to send.

Show your child that school matters by asking about it every day. Let him know that his best chance for a happy and successful life is to take school seriously and always do his best.



Are you encouraging communication?

Middle school is a time of change—and this school year has brought more than most! Are you showing your child that no matter what changes, she can *always* talk to you about it? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you make** time to have regular conversations with your child? hugs, thumbs-up, etc.—as well as with words?
2. **Do you try** to stay calm when speaking with your child, even when you disagree?
3. **Do you show** respect for your child's point of view, and expect the same from her?
4. **Do you ask** questions to help her figure out how to solve problems for herself?
5. **Do you communicate** non-verbally—with smiles,

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean that you are keeping the lines of communication open. For each no, try that idea.

"Constancy of care.
Perhaps that's all we
can hope to find that
doesn't change. But
what a lot that is!"
—Fred Rogers

Explore a world of choices

Celebrate Earth Day, April 22, by helping your child learn about the impact humans can have on the planet's health. Check out these fun, interactive sites:

- **The Chocolate Challenge** (planetfood.education.nationalgeographic.com) from National Geographic. Create a chocolate bar and discover the environmental and financial effects of production choices.
- **Recycle City** (www3.epa.gov/recyclecity). Explore Recycle City and learn how doing simple things at home and in your neighborhood can help reduce waste, use less energy and save money.

Think about the plus side

Middle schoolers often think, "I'm too ..." "I'm not good enough at ..." Turning negative thoughts into positive ones boosts confidence and motivation. When your child is fixed on a negative idea, encourage her to ask herself, "What are some positive thoughts I could have about myself?" "How do these thoughts make me feel?"



Enhance technology skills

Your child probably knows how to use many computer programs and apps. But does he have these important tech skills?

- **Judgment.** Can your child tell if a website is a reliable source? Help him look for clues to determine if it is presenting facts or opinions, and if it is up-to-date.
- **Planning.** Ask your child how he plans to use the information he finds online.
- **Creativity.** Suggest that your child find out about digital tools and ways to present material beyond the basic slideshow.
- **Problem-solving.** When tech issues crop up, encourage him to think of solutions he could try before asking you for help.

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