

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



February 2021

Show your child that learning is exciting and worth the effort

Does your middle schooler have a case of the February blahs? It's easy for students to lose momentum when they feel like they have been doing the same things forever and summer is still far away. To help your child get excited about what she's learning and motivate her to give schoolwork her best effort:



- **Be "wowed."** Do you give off a "been there, done that" vibe when your child tells you about something she's learning? A fact or idea may not be new to you, but if it's new to your child, show some enthusiasm. "You're getting to write bills and try to convince the class to pass them into law? That's so cool! How does it work?"
- **Recognize progress** and small victories. Show your child that you notice the effort she's putting in. A solid B your child worked hard to achieve on her science project is reason for high-fives all around. Congratulating her only when she gets A's may cause her to think, "Why bother trying at all if only 'perfect' is good enough?"
- **Emphasize the short-term.** Instead of talking about working hard for the "rest of the year," try, "Hey, it's Thursday. Just one more quiz to power through and then you can look forward to the weekend!"



Reading to learn is a three-step process

People read in different ways depending on what they want to accomplish—to relax, to find a fact, etc. When students do academic reading, they are *reading to learn*. Review these steps for reading assignments with your child:

- 1. Begin with a quick read.** This is also called skimming or scanning the text. Your child should pay special attention to pictures, headings and text in boldface type. These can give him an idea of what the material is about.
- 2. Read carefully** and thoroughly. To make this step more effective, your child should take notes while he reads. He should also
- write down any words or concepts he doesn't understand, so he can look them up or ask the teacher questions later.
- 3. Read more than once.** For new or difficult material, your child should go back over the assigned passage—even after reading deeply. Rereading takes more time, but it will improve his comprehension and retention.

Assign school responsibility

Children learn to be responsible when they are given responsibilities. To encourage your child to take responsibility for learning, put her in charge of:

- **Setting** an alarm and getting herself up and ready on school days.
- **Updating** the family calendar with test dates and other school commitments.
- **Prioritizing** assignments and creating a daily plan for when she'll do each task.



Give writing a tech twist

Whether screen time is positive or negative depends on what it's used for. Research shows that digital technology can help increase students' writing skills. To make writing on a computer work for your child:

- **Suggest** he write a story with a friend. Collaboration boosts motivation.
- **Encourage** him to edit. Technology makes it easy to go back and strengthen a sentence or reorganize paragraphs.
- **Challenge** him to post movie or product reviews that clearly explain his views.

Source: C. Williams and S. Beam, Technology and writing: Review of Research, *Computers & Education*, Elsevier, [niswc.com/ewrite](https://www.niswc.com/ewrite).

Less stress, more learning

Stress affects health and makes it harder for students to focus on schoolwork. To help your child manage stress, encourage her to:

- **Practice healthy habits.** Exercise can relieve tension and clear her head. Eating right and getting adequate sleep will help her feel her best.
- **Pause for thought.** Taking time to stop and think about an issue may help her put it into perspective and discover a solution.





How should I handle my child's annoying behavior?

Q: My sixth grader is earning good grades. But he's driving me crazy at home! He zones out when I speak to him, and loves to provoke me. What should I do?

A: It's great that your middle schooler is learning well. Home environment plays a big part in academic success, particularly with distance learning. Handling his behavior in positive ways can help him continue making progress.



There's a good chance that your child isn't trying to upset you. In fact, his behavior may not be about you at all. According to some psychologists, you can think about it two ways:

- 1. Positive thinking.** This means seeing your child as basically good, and chalking up his "zone outs" to distraction, rather than misbehavior. When his behavior is annoying, you can see it as a function of his development, rather than as an insult.
- 2. Negative thinking.** Negative thinkers see their children's misbehavior as disrespectful, and targeted at them. They often respond with anger.

Your child is an adolescent living and learning in challenging times. Try not to take his behavior personally. Correct it calmly, share a laugh and ignore those eye rolls and bored looks.



Are you helping your child learn to work well with teachers?

Your child probably likes some of her teachers more than others. But she needs to know how to work productively with all of them. Are you showing her how to get along with authority figures? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you remind** your child to speak politely to teachers?
- 2. Do you help** your child keep things in perspective? She doesn't have to like a teacher to learn in that class.
- 3. Do you help** your child figure out possible causes if she's having a problem in a class?
- 4. Do you encourage** your child to approach her teachers and try to work with them to resolve issues?
- 5. Do you ask** for a parent-teacher-student conference if

your child is unable to work through an issue herself?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child interact effectively with teachers. For each no, try that idea.

"The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn ... and change."

—Carl Rogers

Bust drug and alcohol myths

Middle schoolers have a lot of misconceptions about alcohol and substance abuse. So it is vital that you speak honestly and openly with your child about the dangers. Discuss myths like:

- **Trying something once can't hurt.** In fact, some drugs can be lethal on the first try. And young brains are especially susceptible to addiction—there is no safe amount of alcohol or illicit drugs.
- **It makes you feel good.** The good feeling is temporary and deceiving. Substance abuse damages mental as well as physical health.
- **If no one's driving, it's not a big deal.** Underage drinking and recreational drug use is illegal *all the time*.

Address obstacles head on

Your child has set learning goals and planned steps for meeting them. But has she thought about how to avoid obstacles and distractions that might crop up? Help her plan to take actions such as turning off her phone while she studies, making backup arrangements, and keeping track of supplies and letting you know when she is running low.



Service builds connection

Middle schoolers get a bad rap for being lazy. But the truth is they like to make contributions that matter—and they benefit by doing it. To make a difference, your child could:

- **Organize** friends to make cards for hospice and nursing home residents.
- **Share** information for a local charity on social media.
- **Offer** tutoring or schoolwork help to elementary schoolers online.

Helping Students Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2021, The Parent Institute[®],

a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1526-9272