

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



March 2021

## Share strategies that will help your child take more useful notes

Learning to take effective notes gives your child an edge in his classes. Even if his teachers provide handouts on the material, adding his own notes can help your child remember the teacher's explanations and emphasis. And at test time, reviewing detailed class notes is a great way to study.

To boost the value of your child's notes, teach him to:

- **Figure out what's important.**

Rather than writing down every word the teacher says, he should listen for names, dates, times of events and other key facts. If the teacher writes something down, your child should, too.

- **Write with a pen or pencil.** Studies show this helps students remember more than typing notes on a keyboard.

- **Reread and clarify** each day's notes after school while the material is fresh in his mind. This reinforces it in his memory. He should make sure his notes are neat and complete enough that he'll understand them when he studies later.

- **Buddy up.** Comparing notes with a classmate can help him pick up details he missed.

- **Stay organized.** Remind him to date his notes and file them in his binder (or binder section) for that class so he can find them easily.



## Find ways to make reading a daily event

Many things are in competition for your middle schooler's attention. If she has no reading assignment, reading may drop on her list of priorities.

But reading every day is one of the best things your child can do to ensure academic success. To provide some motivation:

- **Read at the same time.** Your child is less likely to be distracted if you are doing the same thing she is. Pick a time each day when you can both sit down for at least 20 minutes and read.

- **Include audiobooks.** Listening to these recordings is a proven

way to build reading skills like fluency. A celebrity reader may grab your child's interest, and she can listen while she exercises or completes a chore.

- **Plan family activities** that require reading. Build something together that requires reading instructions, for example.

- **Read aloud.** After you get to the good part, your child may be more willing to continue on her own.

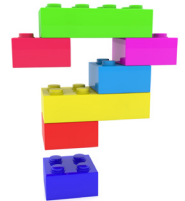
## Connect new ideas to old

Linking new material to things they already know helps students retain new concepts. Have your child ask himself:

- **Where** have I seen part of this before?

- **What** does this remind me of?

- **How** does this relate to what I am learning in my other classes?



## Avoid clashing over math

As math gets more abstract, kids who have missed basic concepts along the way can find it hard to keep up. They may be anxious and defensive. To avoid a battle:

- **Acknowledge** your child's feelings. Help her figure out what she *does* understand and pinpoint where things get confusing.

- **Urge** her to ask the teacher or another student for help with the confusing parts.

- **Ask** the teacher about your child's progress. Are her struggles common? What will help?



## Open communication helps keep your child safe

Protecting students—from COVID-19 and much more—is critically important. Discuss safety issues with your child. Give him the reasons for the rules. Talk about:

- **The school's health,** safety and security procedures, both in school and online.

- **Social media** and online safety.

- **Strategies for solving** problems and diffusing tense situations.

- **Concerns about students** who may be dangerous to themselves or others.

- **The importance of telling you,** a teacher or another trusted adult if he sees something that doesn't seem right.



## Is it necessary to let my child make the wrong choice?

**Q:** I know I should let my child make more decisions for herself. But how can I help her learn to make good choices without letting her make poor ones?

**A:** Making bad decisions—and learning from them—is a key way children learn to make better decisions. If your child makes a poor choice, you're not "letting" her fail. You're allowing her to figure out what good decision-making is. Of course, she still needs you to make big decisions for her—about health, safety and school attendance, for example. But she can learn from making decisions about things like:



- **Her study routine.** Doing assignments is non-negotiable. But you can be flexible about when and where your child does them. Her grades will give both of you an idea whether her choices are working.
- **Bedtime.** If your child wants to stay up later, ask her what she thinks is an appropriate bedtime. If it allows her to get at least nine hours of sleep each night and still be ready for school in the morning, let her try it. If she's too tired to function during the day, have her rethink her decision.
- **Her room.** Your middle schooler may decide she's OK with a messy room. As long as it is sanitary, don't argue. If she can't find her calculator or the worksheet she needs, she'll learn from the consequences.



## Are you making it easier to concentrate?

Focusing and tuning out distractions is challenging for middle schoolers. Pandemic learning conditions can add to the challenge. Are you helping your child strengthen his powers of concentration? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you discourage** multi-tasking? If your child is doing something else, he isn't giving schoolwork his full attention.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you suggest** that your child set goals for classes and study sessions? What does he want to learn?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you avoid** interrupting your child when he is doing schoolwork?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to do a focus-building activity he enjoys—like reading or practicing a sports skill?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you tell** your child to jot down distracting thoughts and save them for later?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child stay focused on learning. For each no, try that idea.*

*"We are not born focusing. It's an acquired skill that requires initial effort and constant upgrading."*

—Robert Genn

## Share a study system for chapter or unit tests

Help your child take an organized approach to studying for big tests that cover an entire book chapter or subject unit. Have her:

- **Review the chapter** or unit section by section and write questions she thinks the teacher might ask on index cards.
- **Write answers** to the questions on the back of the cards.
- **Make more cards** for new terms or vocabulary words and put their definitions on the back.
- **Study the cards.** Offer to quiz your child on them when she's ready.

## Get set to manage time

Most middle schoolers lack a good sense of time. On a study break, they might surf videos online for an hour and think it has been only five minutes. Then they're amazed that they don't have enough time to complete assignments.



When your child takes a study break, set a time limit—say 10 minutes. Have him set it on a kitchen timer. You won't have to nag him when his time is up—the timer will do it for you!

## Talk about your struggles at your child's age

Do you remember being 13 and going through difficult times? You may have felt lonely, clumsy, nervous or misunderstood.

Talk about those experiences with your middle schooler. The feelings may have been painful, but thinking and talking about them can help you find common ground with your child. It's likely you will be more understanding when she's upset, and she may be more willing to open up if she thinks you can relate to what she's saying.

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