

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board

October 2004

## ENCOURAGING WRITING

### Suggest different kinds of writing

Children need to be able to express themselves effectively in writing. The more your child is comfortable writing, the better a writer she will be. Encourage her to try her hand at the following types of writing—and any others she is interested in.

- **Writing to convince.** Your child may enjoy expressing her opinion in a letter to an organization or newspaper editor.
- **Writing to inform.** Challenge your child to think of an event she could “cover” for the school newspaper.
- **Writing to keep in touch.** Have your child make the day of a relative or friend by sending a friendly note.
- **Writing to entertain.** Your child could write a story, poem, play, or song.



Source: Vicki Poretta and Marian Edelman Borden, *Mom's Guide to Raising a Good Student*, ISBN: 0-02-861942-0 (John Wiley & Sons, 1-800-434-3422, www.wiley.com).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Share important values with your child

Parents want children to grow up to be good citizens who stand up for important values, respect others and contribute to the world. But how can you nurture such qualities in your child? Experts suggest that you:

- **Talk about moral issues** with your child. Discuss questions such as, “Why is it wrong to copy another student’s homework?”
- **Set high expectations.** Say things like, “Raising your grade in math requires hard work, but I know you can do it!”
- **Give your child** opportunities to manage and save money.
- **Expect your child** to treat you, his teachers, friends and others with respect.
- **Help your child** learn about careers. Encourage him to ask people what they like about their jobs. Have him find out how jobs that interest him benefit others.
- **Provide guidance** about education. Help your child pick classes that will help him reach goals.
- **Encourage your child** to select an issue that he cares about. Have him read about it in magazines and the newspaper. Then discuss ways you could act on it together.

Source: “Parents Are Powerful,” Center for Law and Education (202/986-3000, www.cleweb.org).

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Reach out to teachers

Middle school parents and teachers are busy. But that shouldn’t keep them from communicating. Consider these steps to stay in touch with your child’s teacher:

- **Contact the teacher** instead of waiting for her to contact you.
- **Find convenient ways** to check in, such as through notes or e-mail.

Source: Bruce Hammond, “Middle School Crisis,” ParentSoup, www.parentsoup.com/print/0,7853,154903,00.html.

## HELPING MIDDLE SCHOOLERS COPE

### Children need a network

People in business thrive when they have good contacts. So do middle schoolers. Encourage your child to identify other students he can count on to:

- **Tell** him about assignments.
- **Help** with studying.
- **Be there** when he just needs to talk.



Source: Lori D. Roets, “Making It in Middle School,” August 2001, *Washington Families Magazine*, 703/318-1385, www.familiesmagazines.com.

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Help your child use math

Middle schoolers should be familiar with fractions, decimals and percentages. Give your child real-life opportunities to use them:

- **At a restaurant.** Tell your child what percent you want to tip. Figure out the total together.
- **At the store,** let your child add your purchases and calculate tax.



Source: Patricia Clark Kenschaft, *Math Power*, ISBN: 0-201-77289-2 (Perseus Books Group, 1-800-386-5656, www.perseuspublishing.com).

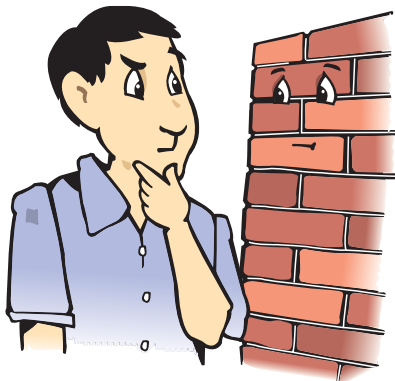
## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents get middle schoolers to listen?

**Q:** Now that my son is in middle school, I can't seem to communicate with him. It's like talking to a brick wall. What can I do?

**A:** Keep in mind that talking is just one method of communicating. There are many ways to be persuasive. Think of yourself as a salesperson. A good salesperson asks questions, listens carefully, and then provides guidance. So next time you want to influence your son:

- **Think of questions** that will engage his self-interest. What does he know that he can apply to the situation?
- **Repeat what you've heard.** Restate your child's concerns and point of view.
- **Ask your child** what he might do to learn or meet his goals.
- **State your views** and values without insisting that your child agree.
- **Be positive** and believe that your son will catch on.
- **Teach what to do** more than what *not* to do.
- **Set a good example.** Explain why you do what you do.
- **Compliment what your child does right.** When needed, gently suggest how he can improve.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you encouraging independence?

Responsibility and self-reliance help kids get schoolwork finished. Here's a quiz to see if you're helping your middle schooler develop these traits. Give yourself five points for something you always do, zero points for something you never do—or any score in between.

- \_\_\_ **1. I let my child** make decisions, such as what to wear or which healthy snack to eat.
- \_\_\_ **2. I require my child** to take good care of her belongings.
- \_\_\_ **3. I trust my child** with jobs, including family chores.
- \_\_\_ **4. I ask my child** for her opinions about things.

\_\_\_ **5. I give my child** more freedom as she shows more responsibility.

**How did you score?** Twenty or above is good. Fifteen to 19 is average. Below 15? Use the ideas in this quiz to help your child become more independent.

“The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn ... and change.”  
— Carl Rogers

## PARENT TO PARENT

### Make time for your family

To stay close to middle schoolers, parents must make time for them. To find that time, **Cincinnati, Ohio**, mom **Pam Frank** suggests that parents set limits for themselves, too.

You might restrict how much you use the computer, how many TV shows you watch or how long you talk on the phone. Make the limits known to the whole family, and strictly adhere to them. You'll be setting a great example for your child.

## PEER PRESSURE

### Early dating may affect your child's school success

Research suggests that middle schoolers are “dating” more than parents might think. About one in three have a girlfriend or boyfriend before age 14. This is linked to behavior problems in boys. But it seems to hurt girls even more. They may have lower self-esteem and eating problems. This can affect grades, too.

Source: Adrian Humphreys, “Dating Too Soon May Hurt Girls' Education,” April 13, 2002 (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 1-888-848-4637, [www.suntimes.com](http://www.suntimes.com)).

## BUILDING THINKING SKILLS

### Memory work can improve thinking skills

Building long-term memory is a great way to sharpen thinking skills. Try a challenge with your child this week.

Ask her to memorize a poem, song or part of a book. You do the same. At the end of the week, recite your pieces to each other.

Source: Vito Perrone, *101 Educational Conversations With Your 6th Grader*, ISBN: 0-7910-1922-5 (Chelsea House Publishers, 1-800-848-2665, [www.chelseahouse.com](http://www.chelseahouse.com)).



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