

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board

September 2004

## COPIING WITH MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

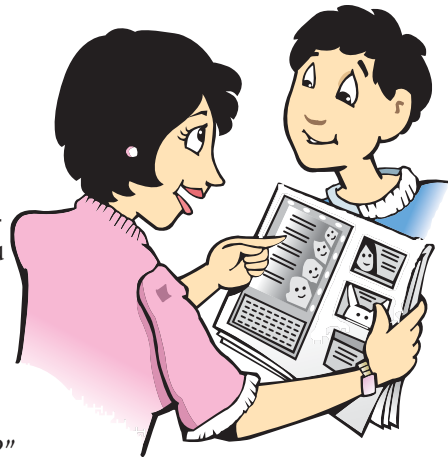
### Use a low-key approach to engage your child in conversation

Remember when your child couldn't wait to tell you about his day in school? Now he grunts a few words, grabs a snack and heads for his room.

Try these conversation starters to get him talking:

- **A compliment.** Try, "I like that outfit!" Your child cares about what you think, even if he doesn't show it.
- **A comment.** "I noticed that your favorite group has a new CD out." Pick a topic your child can't resist.
- **A question.** "What are your thoughts about the game Saturday?" "What is your favorite subject in school so far?" Avoid queries that can be answered quickly with "yes" or "no."
- **An opinion.** "I think this movie looks interesting, but I'm curious about what you think." Invite your child to weigh in on all kinds of things—what to have for dinner, what book to read, what brand to purchase, etc.

Source: William L. Coleman, *What Makes Your Teen Tick*, ISBN: 1-55661-322-9 (Bethany House Publishers, 1-800-889-8256, [www.bethanyhouse.com](http://www.bethanyhouse.com)).



## HOMWORK

### Help with homework the right way

One of the most important things middle schoolers learn is how to complete homework independently. A child who can't do this will struggle in high school, when students can have three or more hours of work each night.

Here's how to encourage your child to take charge of assignments:

- **Set rules together.** Help her decide when and where she will

study each day. Turn off the TV and avoid other distractions.

- **Talk about assignments** and offer study hints. For example, divide big projects into small steps. And get tough subjects out of the way first to ease stress.
- **Review completed work** with your child. When you point out errors, she must be the one to fix them.

Source: Marguerite Kelly, "Motivate a 12-Year-Old with Nudging, Not Nagging," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2001 (The Washington Post Co., 1-800-627-1150, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)).

## PEER PRESSURE

### Promote participation in extracurricular activities

After-school activities are great opportunities to match kids with positive peer groups. Students can pick which hobbies they enjoy. They can meet other kids who share their interests. This is better than simply "hanging out," which can lead to boredom and risky behavior.

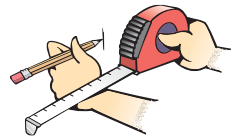
Source: Kate Kelly, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parenting a Teenager*, ISBN: 0-02-861277-9 (Penguin Group, 1-800-788-6262, <http://us.penguin.com>).

## HEALTHY HABITS

### Family projects provide learning opportunities

What's next on your to-do list?

Maybe your middle schooler can help—and learn. She might measure for new shelves, comparison shop or organize photos. Just make sure it's an activity she'll enjoy.



Source: "Sixth Grade: How to Help," ParentSoup, [www.parentsoup.com/print/0,7853,264867,00.html](http://www.parentsoup.com/print/0,7853,264867,00.html).

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Share test success secrets

What's the secret to doing well on tests? Training the brain. Reviewing is like lifting weights—the more you do, the stronger you become. Tell your child to look over information:

- After each class.
- While doing homework.
- The week before a test.
- When tests are returned (to understand any wrong answers).



Source: Trevor Romain and Elizabeth Verdick, *True or False? Tests Stink!* ISBN: 1-57542-073-2 (Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Revise viewing rules now

**Q:** Over the summer, my daughter watched more TV and played more video games than usual. Now she gets angry when I try to stop her. How can I curb her habit?

**A:** Many parents relax rules a bit during the summer. But too much TV and computer use can interfere with reading, socializing, exercising and learning. Setting limits is the right thing to do.

Try these strategies:

- **Decrease access.** Put TVs and computers in central locations—never in your child's room.
- **Change the schedule.** Notice when your child focuses on TV and video games, such as after dinner. Start doing fun things as a family during this time.
- **Increase awareness.** Have your child keep track of how many hours she spends on TV and computer games per week. Think of other activities that might make her happier, healthier and smarter.
- **Choose wisely.** Replace mindless games or shows with high-quality alternatives. Watch them together and discuss what you see.
- **Say, "When ... then."** For example, "When you finish your homework



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you ready for a great school year?

Kids do better in school with their parents' help. Here's a quiz to see if you're pitching in. Give yourself five points for something you always do, zero points for something you never do—or any score in between.

- \_\_\_ **1. I make sure my child** gets healthy meals and enough sleep.
- \_\_\_ **2. I stay in touch** with my child's teachers.
- \_\_\_ **3. I am available** during a daily homework time.
- \_\_\_ **4. I encourage my child** to read for fun.
- \_\_\_ **5. I attend school events** for parents.

**How did you score?** Twenty points or above is good. Fifteen to 19 is average. Below 15? Use the ideas above to make this school year a successful one.

*"There is no better antidote to the potential pitfalls of peer pressure than parents who are interested and involved."*  
— John Rosemond

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Persistence is important

Middle school can frustrate even the best students. This is the time to reward persistence. These steps will help:

- **Don't show anger** or disappointment when your child has trouble with lessons. Instead, say how proud you are of his hard work.
- **Applaud your child** when he tries to learn something, even if he doesn't "get it" immediately.

Source: "Middle School Malaise," American Psychological Association, APA HelpCenter, [www.helping.apa.org/family/malaise.html](http://www.helping.apa.org/family/malaise.html).

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Get your child organized

Middle schoolers have a lot to keep track of. These steps help:

- **Simplify.** Don't let your child take on too many things.
- **Plan.** Calendars and checklists keep everyone focused.
- **Organize.** School items should go in the same place every day.

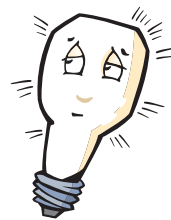
Source: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, *The Roller Coaster Years*, ISBN: 0-553-06684-6 (Broadway Books, 1-800-733-3000, [www.randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com)).

## WHEN YOU NEED HELP

### Children can be gifted and underachievers

Some bright children daydream in class. If this sounds like your child, take these steps:

- **Talk with the teacher.** Exchange ideas for motivating your child.
- **Show support.** Tell your child that you believe in her and that you're working to find solutions.



Source: Sylvia Rimm, "Can Your Child be Both Gifted and an Underachiever in School?" National Association for Gifted Children, 202/785-4268, [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org).

## Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Executive Editor: Jeff Peters. Senior Editor: Betsie Ridnauer.  
Editor: Patricia Hodgdon. Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares.  
Writer: Susan O'Brien. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter  
Head of Translations: Michelle Beal  
Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.  
Copyright © 2004, The Parent Institute<sup>®</sup>, a division of NIS, Inc.  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1021