

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board

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HELPING MIDDLE SCHOOLERS COPE

Support students as they enter middle school

Even the most relaxed kids experience stress as they make the move from elementary to middle school. So much is new to them—the building, the teachers, the rules and many of the students. How can parents help? Experts suggest that you:



- **Encourage tasks that build responsibility.** For example, help your child organize her comic book collection. Or create the perfect “study spot.”
- **Allow your child to try new things.** Emphasize that it’s okay to make mistakes. They’re part of learning!
- **Stay involved with education.** Your child should see how much you value learning. When possible, attend school events.
- **Be understanding of your child’s fears**, such as, “How will I find my locker every day?” and “How will I do all my homework?”
- **Give your child independence when she’s ready**—but also keep family connections strong.
- **Communicate with the school about your child’s progress.** If signs of a major difficulty arise (such as depression or anxiety), be sure to seek help quickly.

Source: National Middle School Association and National Association of Elementary School Principals, “Supporting Students in Their Transition to Middle School,” NMSA, www.nmsa.org/AboutNMSA/PositionStatements/TransitioningStudents/tabid/283/Default.aspx.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Partner with your child’s middle school

Research shows that kids benefit when parents actively support education. To do this:

- **Do** activities that reinforce learning. Plan a trip, for example, and estimate costs like gas and food.
- **Set** limits on how much TV your child watches. Make sure programs are age appropriate.
- **Talk** with your middle schooler about his day. Show interest in everything, including non-academic topics.
- **Encourage** reading. Send the message that reading is fun—not just something that’s “for school.”
- **Stay** in touch with teachers. Work as a team to help your child succeed.

Source: Susan J. Paik, “Ten Strategies That Improve Learning,” Educational HORIZONS, www.pilambda.org/horizons/v81-2/paik.pdf.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Prevent procrastination

Sometimes giving a child chores feels like a job itself. But chores teach important lessons. When your child procrastinates:

- **Use** routines. Have your child do things the same way every day, such as always making his bed before breakfast.
- **Be** clear about chores. Explain how and when they should be done. Post a list of jobs and their “due dates.”

Source: Edward L. Schor, *Caring for Your School-Age Child*, ISBN: 0-553-37992-1 (Bantam Books, 1-800-726-0600, www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell).

ENCOURAGING WRITING

Show writing’s many uses

Keep your child from seeing writing as a “school only” activity by finding real-life opportunities for her to write. You might:

- **Insist** that she write thank-you notes whenever she receives a gift.
- **Ask** her to write instructions for how to reboot the computer, program the VCR, etc., that you can follow when she’s not home.



STUDY SKILLS

‘SQ3R’ helps with studying

SQ3R is a method that helps children remember textbook material. It stands for:

- **Survey.** Look over the material briefly.
- **Question.** Write a question for each section heading.
- **Read.** Find the answers to your questions.
- **Recite.** Say the answers aloud.
- **Review.** Take time to review your work.

Source: Peggy Gisler, Ed.S. and Marge Eberts, Ed.S., “Building Study Skills,” FamilyEducation, <http://school.familyeducation.com/study-skills/homework/41128.html>.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Does middle school grumpiness ruin your mood?

Q: I know it's normal for middle schoolers to be moody, but I miss the good old days when my son was so agreeable. How can I get him to cooperate?

A: Adolescence is a time of adjustment for kids and parents. It helps to remember that:

- **Moods are as tough for your child as they are for you.** One minute, he's fine. The next, he's screaming at you. These ups and downs are frustrating. Instead of focusing on anger, think about how much you love him. Recall how you felt during your adolescent years. Keep the lines of communication open.
- **Accept your child for who he is now.** Don't dwell on things he used to enjoy, such as having you sing to him or play catch with him. Find new activities to explore together. Does he like to read? Join a parent-teen book club. Is he into music? Play his favorite CD in the car. Does he want to "make a difference"? Volunteer for a good cause together.
- **Address concerns quickly.** It's normal for your child to want freedom and privacy—a chance to figure out "who he is." But don't allow him to withdraw completely. If he has serious problems in relationships, school or other parts of life, get professional advice right away.



PARENT QUIZ

How smooth are your mornings?

It's often tough for middle schoolers to get going in the morning. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child make mornings smoother:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child to put school materials in one place at night?
- ___ **2. Do you suggest** that your child lay out the next day's clothes at night?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to get nine hours of sleep?
- ___ **4. Do you make** nutritious breakfast foods available?
- ___ **5. Do you expect** your child to assume responsibility for being ready on time?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're helping your child get off to a good start. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to make mornings less hectic for your child.

"To bring a child up in the way he should go, travel that way yourself once in a while."

—Josh Billings

DISCIPLINE

Learn how to separate friendship and parenting

It's wonderful to have things in common with your child, such as hobbies. But kids and parents can't agree on everything. Often you must be your child's leader, not her friend. Even if she complains, she's also relieved that you put her best interests first.

Source: Marilyn Gardner, "The disappearing generation gap," CSMonitor.com, www.csmonitor.com/2002/0529/p14s02-lifp.htm.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Remind your child that success comes from effort

Research shows that children who think success comes from ability instead of hard work lose motivation to succeed. To promote school success, have him focus on:

- **Better study habits.** This includes reading carefully and making outlines.
- **Effort and improvement.** Take notice of every improvement, big or small.

Source: Lynley Hicks Anderman and Carol Midgley, "Motivation and Middle School Students," Eric Digests, www.ericdigests.org/1999-1/motivation.html.

REINFORCING LEARNING

Stay involved with your child's schoolwork

Even when your child reaches middle school, it is important to stay involved with her education.

Reviewing your child's schoolwork can provide insights into her progress. Look at the papers she brings home. Supervise during homework time. If problems arise, you'll notice quickly. And you'll have plenty of chances to show how proud you are of her.

Source: Rick Pierce, "Bored of Education," ADHDNews, www.adhdnews.com/mar98.htm.



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