MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board

September 2008

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Start the attendance habit early

Regular attendance is absolutely essential for school success. Your child cannot learn if he is not in school. The beginning of the school year is a great time to show your child how important attendance is—to you *and* to his education. Studies show that students who skip school are more likely to fall behind in their studies, drop out of school, join a gang, use alcohol or illegal drugs, commit a crime or get arrested.

Fortunately, you play a big role in getting your child to attend school. You can:

- **Make it clear to your child** that school is his most important job. Tell him that you expect him to be there *every day*.
- **Avoid scheduling doctor's appointments** and vacations during school hours. Taking your child out of school for these reasons shows him that you don't really think school is his top priority.
- **Tell the school how to reach you** if your child is absent. If you find out your child has skipped even once, talk to him—there may be a reason he is cutting class, such as a bully or a learning difficulty. Most problems can be solved when parents and the school work together.

Source: Eileen M. Garry, "Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/truncy.pdf.

BUILDING CHARACTER

Teach your child to listen to conscience

People of good character are usually aware of their conscience, and they act on it. Conscience is the "little voice" inside that tells you whether decisions are positive or negative. To help your child follow her conscience:

- **Set the right example.** Be honest. Return what you borrow. If you are wrong, apologize and try to make amends. Your child is watching and listening.
- **Supervise media use.** If you don't approve of something your child sees, discuss why. Clarify your values.
- **Talk about** your child's decisions. What did her conscience tell her? Did she follow it? Why or why not? Would she do anything differently next time?
- **Notice when your child** follows her conscience. "You were brave to stand up for Sarah. You must be really proud of yourself."

Source: Michelle Borba, *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, ISBN: 0-7879-6226-0 (Jossey-Bass, 1-800-956-7739, www.josseybass.com).

HOMEWORK

Stay informed of teachers' homework expectations

Find out about how much time your child's teachers expect your child to spend on homework for her classes. It will be easier to spot trouble if your child never seems to have any homework or if it's taking her all night to complete it.

Source: Rosemarie Clark and others, *The School-Savvy Parent*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

ENCOURAGING READING

Ask, 'What do you think?'

Hand your child an interesting newspaper or magazine article. Then ask a prodding question. "What do you think of this?" "What do you think this person should have done?"

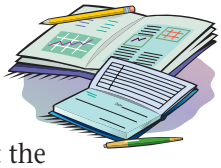
This activity will keep your child informed about current events. He'll learn that reading gives him an edge. And he'll see that you care about what he thinks.

Source: "Parents, Teens and Reading," International Reading Association, www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/06/c0.pdf.

REINFORCING LEARNING

Work next to your child

Helping your child learn at home doesn't mean teaching her the parts of a plant cell! Try working alongside your child. While she's doing math homework at the kitchen table, you can balance your checkbook. This will remind her that the skills she learns in school—like math—are useful throughout her life.



Source: "Parent Involvement—Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/adolescence/partx2.html.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents ease the transition to middle school?

Q: My child is starting middle school this year—and we're *both* nervous about it! What can I do to help make her transition to middle school as smooth as possible?

A: It's a little harder to help your child transition to middle school than it was to help her get used to kindergarten. For one thing, you can't walk her to class anymore—she'd likely die of embarrassment! But that doesn't mean you can't help. You can make the transition easier if you:

- **Attend back-to-school events.** Have your child show you where her classes are. Ask her to point out her locker. She may feel more confident about finding her way around the school after playing "tour guide."
- **Make sure your child knows** what time to get up, when to meet the bus, and what time to do her homework. Knowing what to expect for at least part of the day will comfort your child.
- **Encourage your child to stay organized.** Give her a calendar for keeping track of her assignments. Remind her to clean out her backpack and locker every week. Staying organized may help her better manage her homework.

If you find your child is having a hard time settling in, talk to her guidance counselor.

Source: "Is Your Child Ready for Middle School?" America's Career Resource Network, www.acrnetwork.com/parents/ready_for_middle.htm#3.

PARENT QUIZ

Do you show that school is important?

When children see school as being important to their families, they are more likely to try their hardest. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're showing your child how important school is:

___1. **Do you talk** with your child about the new school year?
___2. **Do you tell** your child that school is a high priority?
___3. **Do you make** it clear to your child that you expect him to follow school rules?
___4. **Do you attend** events the school holds for parents?
___5. **Do you ask** your child what he is learning in school?

How did you do? *Each* yes *answer means you're showing your child that school is important. For each* no *answer, try that idea from the quiz to change your answer to* yes.

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

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Rethink your preteen's chores this school year

Now that your child is in middle school, he's ready to handle important day-to-day chores like doing his laundry and packing his lunch. Don't suddenly give him 30 new tasks—but do work together to assign him some new responsibilities.

AFTER SCHOOL

Monitor your child's television show choices

Studies have shown that children who watch violent television shows spend less time with friends than children who watch nonviolent shows. So how can you monitor what your child's watching?

- **Know** what she watches on TV.
- **Allow** only nonviolent shows. Shows that begin after 9 p.m. are usually not for children.
- **Limit** TV time—especially unsupervised TV time.

Source: Sandra G. Boodman, "Solo Viewing, Bad Endings, Watching Violent TV May Cost Kids Friends," *The Washington Post* (The Washington Post Company, 1-800-627-1150, www.washpost.com).

WELLNESS

Make exercise exciting

Exercise can increase your child's energy. That helps in a lot of areas, including school. Try these fun ideas:

- **Have a silly contest.** For example, who can hula hoop for the longest time?
- **Travel in new ways.** Instead of driving to the store, consider walking.
- **Do something new.** You might try yoga or bowling. Ask your child for suggestions.

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