

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

Understand middle school stress

Did you have a stressful day? Your child may have, too. Aside from the typical demands of homework and chores, some middle schoolers are bothered by:

- **Problems** with friends.
- **Significant tension** in the family.
- **Being** overly self-critical.
- **Too many** extracurricular activities.
- **Unrealistic expectations** of themselves.

It's important that your child learn to manage his stress level. Kids who cope poorly with stress can become anxious, withdrawn, ill or aggressive. It may help if you:

- **Keep** an eye on how stress affects him.
- **Really listen** when he talks.
- **Encourage** him to eat and exercise regularly.
- **Help** him break big tasks into small, manageable parts.
- **Support his involvement** in positive social activities, like sports.
- **Give advice** about relaxing techniques, such as exercising, deep breathing and talking things out.

By supporting your child in many ways, you'll make it easier for him to face the challenges of middle school and beyond.

Source: "Helping Teenagers with Stress," American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/66.htm.



BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Estimate and check your guesses

Math typically depends on precise answers. But the first step to arriving at those answers is often to make an "educated guess." Encourage your child to do this in daily life—and to check her estimates. You might say:

- "We're going 30 miles an hour. Grandma lives five miles away. How long will it take to get to her house?"
- "If we drink two cups of coffee a day, and each can of coffee makes 50 cups, how many cans of coffee would we have to buy in a year?"
- "How many pieces of candy are in that bag?"
- "How many people are sitting in the first three rows?"
- "If you get \$20 every time you rake a yard, how many yards would you have to rake to earn \$10,000?"

Source: Virginia Thompson and Karen Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math—The Middle School Years*, ISBN: 0-912511-29-X (University of California at Berkeley, 1-800-897-5036, <http://equals.lhs.berkeley.edu>).

REINFORCING LEARNING

Provide incentives for finishing homework

Many students get into the bad habit of procrastination. Instead, give incentives by:

- **Encouraging** your child when you see her working well.
- **Helping** your child set goals for doing blocks of work (such as reading 10-15 pages). Include a reward, such as a break, for finishing a block.

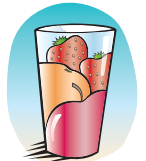
Source: Sydney S. Zentall, Ph.D., and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., *Seven Steps to Homework Success*, ISBN: 1-886941-22-X (Specialty Press, Inc., 1-800-233-9273, www.addwarehouse.com).

MAKING TIME COUNT

Make breakfast a priority

Children need breakfast to do their best in school. Yet breakfast remains the meal that they are most likely to skip. To work breakfast into busy mornings:

- **Prepare** the night before. Make a sandwich your child can grab on the go.
- **Put** breakfast in a glass. Blend fruit, ice and juice for a smoothie.



Source: Andrea Marks and Betty Rothbart, *Healthy Teens, Body and Soul*, ISBN: 0-7432-2561-9 (Fireside, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

STUDY SKILLS

Teach data management

There are many ways to manage scientific facts (called *data*). Your child can:

- **Observe and interpret.** How does the moon change during the month? Why?
- **Analyze.** What does a food label tell you? Is the food healthy?
- **Graph.** What color hair do most family members have? Make a graph to see.



Source: "Science—Making the Grade," *How to Help Your Child Succeed in School* (Newsweek, Inc., 212/445-4000, www.msnbc.msn.com).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can parents prevent poor social choices?

Q: I wanted my child to make new friends in middle school, but I don't care for the ones she's making. What should I do?

A: Your child's budding social life can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, you're glad she's branching out and meeting new people. On the other hand, you don't always feel good about who she's meeting. To handle this tricky issue:



- **Don't judge too quickly.** First impressions are important, but they're not always accurate. If one of your child's new friends rubs you the wrong way, give it a little time. For example, a preteen who seems standoffish may just be shy.
- **Be hospitable.** If you make your home appealing to your child and her friends, they'll want to spend time there (and you can keep an eye on them!). Insist that house rules be obeyed, but don't hover.
- **Know when to intervene.** If one of your child's new friends is clearly bad news—such as if she's violent, threatening or involved with drugs or alcohol—you must step in. Explain why your child can't associate with her outside of school and enforce your decision. Your child might be angry, but she just may thank you later.

PARENT QUIZ

Are you helping your middle schooler develop strong organizational skills?

Success in middle school requires organization. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping with this.

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to write down all assignments in class?
- ___ **2. Do you provide** logical spots at home for storing school supplies?
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** that your child work on projects over time, not at the last minute?
- ___ **4. Do you make** sure your child isn't overloaded with too many activities?

- ___ **5. Do you help** your child stick to a daily homework routine?
How did you do? Each yes answer shows that you're helping your child stay organized. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.

“The important thing is not to stop questioning.”
—Albert Einstein

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Help your child learn to appreciate middle school

If your child suddenly announces, “I hate school,” something probably happened to upset him. Try to pinpoint the problem and find solutions. Did he have trouble with a peer? An assignment? A class? Once the issue is resolved, he may go back to liking (even loving) school again.

Source: Amy Roberts, “I Hate School!” *Parenting*, February 2006 (Time Inc., 1-877-604-7858, www.parenting.com).

DISCIPLINE

Deal with bad behavior

Middle schoolers are moving toward independence. Along the way, some use language they think is “grown up”—but it's actually just plain rude. To curb the back talk:

- **Stay as calm as possible.** In many cases, your child is hoping to get a rise out of you. Avoid letting this work.
- **Explain yourself.** “*Shut up* is a rude and hurtful phrase. We don't use it in this house.”
- **Compliment progress.** “Thanks for being so polite today. I appreciate it.”

Source: Ellen Welty, “How to Stop That Back Talk!” *Redbook*, July 2004 (Hearst Magazines, 1-800-888-0008, www.redbookmag.com).

WELLNESS

Make sleep a priority

According to experts, when children don't get enough sleep, their health can be affected. It's important to have a daily nighttime routine, such as bathing, brushing teeth and reading.



Relaxed kids are more likely to get the sleep they need. And that starts the next day well!

Source: Rebecca Adams, “Bedtime rituals can help get kids tucked in,” *USA TODAY*, April 25, 2006 (Gannett Co. Inc., 1-800-872-0001, www.usatoday.com).

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