

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board

September 2006

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Beat the summer break backslide

There's nothing like two or three months away from pencils and books to take kids' minds off school! Still, it's important to get your child into a school-year rhythm as soon as possible so she doesn't fall behind. To help with this:

- **Reestablish routines.** Did she rely on a certain after-school routine last year? Get her back into it. For instance, if her old habit was to come home, grab a snack and then hit the books, make it easy for her to do it again. Greet her when she gets off the bus, have a few nutritious treats handy and encourage her to get to work.
- **Enforce bedtime.** Staying up late may have been no big deal over the summer, but it won't work during the school year. In fact, lack of sleep can interfere with academics and mood. To make sure your child gets enough shut-eye, set a reasonable bedtime and stick with it.
- **Tame the technology.** Even if you're normally vigilant about TV and video game time, you may have relaxed rules over summer break. Now's the time to be strict again. Too much "screen time" isn't good for kids, so limit your child to an hour or two per day.



DISCIPLINE

Use several discipline strategies

Discipline is most effective when parents have several methods to rely on. Try:

- **The Rules Strategy.** Together with your child, list a few essential rules he must follow. State the consequences for breaking them ... and then follow through.
- **The Domino Strategy.** When it's safe, let your child see the logical results of his actions. For example, if he doesn't put his laundry in the hamper, his favorite outfits won't be clean.
- **The Catch Them Being Good Strategy.** If you want to see a behavior again, take note of it. Focus more on what your child does right than on what he does wrong. He'll want to cooperate again and again to earn your praise and respect.

Source: Tom McMahon, *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents With Kids 11-19*, ISBN: 0-671-89106-5 (Pocket Books, 1-800-323-7445, www.simonsays.com).

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Good attendance means great results for your child

Research shows that good attendance is linked to success in and out of school. Parents play a key role in making sure kids get to school and stay there. Try to schedule vacations and appointments on days off. Being in school is worth the effort!

Source: Howard Johnston, "Meeting the Challenge of Student Attendance At the High School Level," The Principals' Partnership, www.principalspartnership.com/feature204.html.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Goals can lead to success

Success during middle school lays the foundation for a solid experience in high school and beyond. When setting expectations with your child:

- **Start slow** and adjust goals upward.
- **Help plan steps** toward goals so your child knows what to do.
- **Show pride in efforts**—not just the final result. Your encouragement will make a world of difference.



MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Organization can motivate

Organization can prevent middle schoolers from feeling overwhelmed with work. Your child might benefit from:

- **A planner** to track assignments, activities and test dates.
- **Different colored binders or folders** (one for each subject) to store materials.
- **A timer.** Set it and have your child work until it rings. Then she gets a break.



Source: "From slacker to scholar: Helping to motivate your middle schooler," Parent SPOT, www.mohonasen.org/03parents/MSParent/slacker2scholar.htm.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can parents help their children make memorization easier?

Q: My child has trouble memorizing information. How can I help him with this?

A: Memorizing is challenging to most middle schoolers. There are many ways that parents can help. Encourage your child to:

- **Understand what he's studying.** Instead of asking him simply to recite a sequence of events—such as the battles of the Civil War—review the “big picture.” If he understands a whole event, it will be easier to put specifics in order.
- **Be creative.** If he needs to list the first 10 U.S. Presidents, for example, brainstorm about how to keep the information straight. He could make up a rhyme about them or sing their names to a familiar tune. If he's a visual learner, have him study their portraits.
- **Go over information at odd times.** Instead of always sitting at the kitchen table to study, have your child mentally review throughout the day. Good times to do this include while waiting for the bus or getting ready for bed.
- **Write it out.** Some kids remember material better after they've written it down. If your child struggles with certain facts, give this a try. He may need to write things several times. But it can be the difference between remembering and forgetting.



Source: “Remembering,” Cook Counseling Center, Division of Student Affairs, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/remember.html.

PARENT QUIZ

Are you encouraging healthy habits?

Childhood obesity is a serious problem. Overweight children may be less healthy than leaner peers. They may also get teased, which can make school difficult. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping to promote a healthy lifestyle:

- ___ 1. **Do you limit** TV, video game and computer time?
- ___ 2. **Do you encourage** your child to play a sport?
- ___ 3. **Do you keep** healthful snacks on hand?
- ___ 4. **Do you resist** driving when you and your child can walk?

___ 5. **Do you model** good habits by eating well and exercising?
How did you do? Each *yes* answer shows you're emphasizing wellness. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

“Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.”
 —Roger Lewin

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Revamp your child's chores

If it's been a while since you updated your child's chore list, it may be time to reassess. Taking responsibility at home can boost confidence. Your middle schooler might:

- **Contribute to meals.** Let her help plan and prepare at least one dinner a week. Review health and kitchen-safety tips.
- **Care for a pet.** She could feed, bathe and brush the dog, for instance. Challenging and rewarding jobs like this build a sense of pride.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Start the year off right!

September is a time of new beginnings for students and their families. Get off to a good start by:

- **Staying** in touch with teachers.
- **Promoting** helpful sleep and study routines.

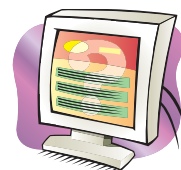
Source: Rosemarie Clark, *The School-Savvy Parent: 365 Insider Tips to Help You Help Your Child*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

HOMWORK

Use Internet sources wisely

Chances are, your child relies on the Internet to do research. To make the most of his online time, remind him to:

- **Consider the source.** Is it a commercial site? Are words misspelled? How recently was it updated?
- **Verify material.** Double-check surprising “facts” found online. List sources.
- **Stay safe.** Avoid chat rooms. Don't reveal personal information online. Ask you about anything even slightly questionable.



Source: Lawrence J. Magid, “Kids Need to Learn How to Sift Out Net Junk,” *SafeTeens.com*, www.safekids.com/articles/junk.htm.

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