

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board

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REINFORCING LEARNING

The scientific method can help your student with projects

One of the ways students learn about science is by performing their own experiments. It helps to be familiar with the "scientific method." Share these basic steps with your child:



- 1. Decide what you want to find out.** Ask a scientific question, such as, "Will there be any difference in the growth of a cactus that is watered once a week for a month as opposed to one that is not watered for a month?"
- 2. Make an educated guess** about what will happen called a *hypothesis*. "Cacti do fine in the desert for weeks without water. So watering once a week won't make much difference."
- 3. Do the experiment.** Have your child raise two cactus plants in the same conditions. The only difference should be watering. One should receive weekly watering for a month and the other should not.
- 4. Write down data.** Have your child record how the cacti did each week and at the end of the experiment.
- 5. Check your results.** How close was the educated guess? "These plants look the same. I was right. A cactus can go without water for a month."

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, 1-800-323-7445, www.kaplan.com).

ENCOURAGING WRITING

Teach the craft of paragraph writing

Knowing how to create strong paragraphs is key to good writing. Remind your child to:

- 1. Set a goal.** What subject will be addressed in the paragraph? What point will be made?
- 2. Write a topic sentence** that expresses the main idea. For instance, "Music from the 1950s is very different from today's music."
- 3. Collect details** that explain, describe or prove the main idea. "Music from the 1950s had a lot of blues in it, while rap is more popular now."
- 4. Decide** which facts best support the main idea. Include them in the following sentences.
- 5. Review the paragraph.** Does each sentence relate directly to the main idea? Does the order make sense?
- 6. Consider** a final sentence that ties things together and leads naturally to the next paragraph.
- 7. Proofread** for spelling and grammar mistakes.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Stay on top of school news

You probably want to know more about middle school than your child tells you. It helps to stay in contact with school staff and obtain:

- A school calendar.
- Class outlines.
- Homework expectations.
- Report cards.

Source: "Moving Up to Middle School," FamilyEducation.com, <http://familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,69-16526,00.html>.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Smart choices indicate growing responsibility

Making good decisions is a sign of maturity. To help your child with this, teach her to:

- **Think it through.** Your child should ask herself, "What would happen if ... ?"
- **Follow school rules.** They're made with everyone's best interest in mind.
- **Keep promises.** Follow through on what you say.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 1-57542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

MAKING TIME COUNT

Bring U.S. history to life

Middle school students often learn about U.S. history. To supplement your child's learning, try these activities with her:

- **Research your family.** Where were your ancestors at different points in history?
- **Learn about local history.** What events occurred where you live?
- **Look closely at money.** Dollars and coins are reminders of important people and places.



Source: Elizabeth Chesla, *A Parent's Guide to 8th Grade*, ISBN: 1-57685-382-9 (Learning Express, 1-888-551-5627, www.learningexpress.com).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Should you help your child when math is confusing?

Q: The way my child does math isn't the same way I did it as a kid. When she struggles with a problem, I don't want to teach her the wrong way to solve it. Should I help at all?

A: Teaching your child different math approaches could confuse her, but don't back off completely. To help without "teaching":

- **Show sympathy.** When your child is frustrated, say things like, "That does look tough" and "I know it's hard. I'm proud of you for trying."
- **Ask questions.** "Where do you think you could start?" "What is the problem asking you to do?" "Would drawing a picture or diagram help?"
- **Suggest reviewing.** Look over past assignments and class work together. Redoing sample problems is a good idea, too.
- **Practice basics.** Problems are much easier if your child can add, subtract, divide and multiply numbers easily.
- **Discuss definitions.** Sometimes kids simply misunderstand instructions. Make sure your child knows important terms.
- **Get help.** Talk with the teacher about your child's progress. See what she recommends. Ask, "How should I help at home?"



PARENT QUIZ

Are you helping your child focus?

Middle school students need to concentrate on important tasks, such as homework and listening in class. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging this.

- ___ 1. **Do you make sure** your child gets enough sleep each night?
- ___ 2. **Do you make** the most of your child's learning style, such as by using visual aids for a visual learner?
- ___ 3. **Do you keep** your home relatively quiet at study time?
- ___ 4. **Do you provide** a healthful breakfast before school?

- ___ 5. **Do you encourage** your child to prepare for classes by reviewing?
- How did you do?** Each *yes* answer shows you're helping your child pay attention to schoolwork. For each *no* answer, use that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource."
—John F. Kennedy

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Don't give up on low grades

How your middle schooler handles low grades may be the key to improvement. When kids are helped to learn from mistakes, says an expert, this can be a springboard to success. Encourage your child to *go on* rather than *give up*.

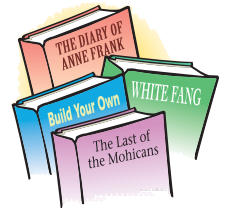
Source: Chris Horn, "Education prof examines middle schoolers' coping strategies," University of South Carolina, www.sc.edu/usctimes/articles/2001/2001-06/middle_school_coping_0601.html.

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Encourage variety in your child's reading materials

Once kids master the fundamentals of reading, they're ready to read all kinds of things. See if your middle schooler has tried:

- Classic fiction.
- Longer chapter books.
- Biographies.
- How-to books.



Source: "Your Independent Reader (ages 9-12)," Reading is Fundamental, www.readingisfundamental.org/parents/9_12.mspcx.

HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE

Give your student a more positive perspective

Middle schoolers often think, "I'm too" "I'm not good enough at" Turning negative thoughts into positive ones is important. It boosts confidence and success in school. When a negative idea comes to mind, your teen can ask himself, "What are some positive thoughts I could have?" "How do these thoughts make me feel?"



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