

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School



May 2023

Support your middle schooler's developing autonomy

Autonomy is the ability to think for oneself, make decisions and act independently. Middle schoolers crave this step toward adulthood, and responsible autonomy leads to greater academic achievement, higher self-esteem and less depression.

Developing responsible autonomy happens over time. To support the process:



- **Discuss the school year** with your middle schooler. What does your child think went well? What would your child like to do differently next year? Encourage asking teachers to suggest strategies for improvement.
- **Involve your student in making plans** for the summer. How does your child want to spend time? How will those ideas fit with family plans?
- **Suggest volunteering** for a cause your child cares about. Help your child research opportunities that match those interests.
- **Establish reasonable guidelines** for your child's social life. Within in them, allow your child the freedom to develop and navigate relationships without your direction. Wait to be asked before giving advice.
- **Talk with your child** about current events. Ask for your student's opinions, and consider them before sharing your own. Say that you are always interested in your child's ideas, whether or not you agree with them.



Provide a lesson in stock market math

Having a lot of money to buy what they want is a common goal for middle schoolers. Here's a game to turn your child's interest in money into a deeper understanding of investing and how the stock market works.

1. **Explain that stocks** are pieces, or shares, of a company. Their value can go up or down, depending on how many people want to buy or sell them.
2. **Show your child** where stock prices are listed online.
3. **Explain that** after buying 100 shares of a \$10 stock, your child would have \$1,000 dollars worth of it. But if the stock goes up to \$11, your child would have \$1,100 worth. If it goes down to \$9, the investment's value drops to \$900.
4. **Name a pretend amount** of money, and let your child decide which stocks to "buy" with it.
5. **Have your child track** the stocks' values for a month. Each day, your child can chart the prices and figure out how much money the investment has made—or lost.

Schedule time for exercise

When students feel stressed, it is harder for them to do their best. Regular daily exercise has been shown to help kids feel happier, stay calm, sharpen memory and develop self-confidence. Help your child fit one hour of exercise into each day. Feeling in control physically may help your middle schooler feel able to take control of studies, too.



Source: "Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress," Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research.

Choose words carefully

Assume that your child is listening when you speak, even if it doesn't look that way. Middle schoolers perk up their ears when they hear their names, and they are mature enough to note the tone of your voice. If you could be overheard, avoid making negative comments about your child to others.

Read some 'brain movies'

Can your child remember every detail of every Marvel movie, but nothing about reading assignments for school? Demonstrate how to turn reading into "brain movies":

1. **Choose a poem** or story that is filled with descriptive language, such as Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven."
2. **Find images online** that set the scene and show them to your child (Poe's house is a museum in Baltimore).
3. **Read the passage aloud.** Ask your child to imagine and describe what it would look like as a movie.



Encourage your child to take the same approach with assigned reading.

Source: D. Wilson and M. Conyers, "Brain Movies: When Readers Can Picture It, They Understand It," Edutopia.



My child is worrying about next year. How can I help?

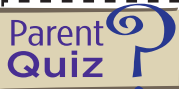
Q: My eighth grader likes middle school, but seems overwhelmed at the idea of starting high school in the fall. What can I do to make the transition easier?

A: Moving up to high school is a big step. And although you can't guarantee that there won't be a few bumps along the way, you *can* help your child prepare for this change.



Here are some things to do this summer:

- **Listen closely** when your child talks about concerns regarding high school. Ask questions to help identify specific issues. You may learn that your child is more worried about getting lost or being picked on for being the youngest than about an increased workload, as you thought.
- **Help your child** strengthen time management skills. High school *does* usually mean a bigger workload and more commitments. Get a calendar or planner (or let your child download an app) and encourage your child to practice using it to track appointments and activities over the summer.
- **Build familiarity** with the high school. Call and ask if your child can take a tour or get a hall map. Read the school's website together. What activities welcome freshmen?
- **Reach out** to a current 9th grader. Hearing first-hand about what the move up to high school is like may ease your child's fears.



Are you minimizing summer health risks?

Summer is prime time for fun and also for taking risks—especially for middle schoolers, who many not always be within sight of an adult. Are you making sure your child takes basic precautions? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** current community health risks with your child's doctor and follow medical recommendations?
- ___ **2. Do you insist** that your child put on sunscreen before going outdoors?
- ___ **3. Do you remind** your child to wash hands regularly?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to drink plenty of water when working, playing or exercising in the heat?
- ___ **5. Do you take** your child's maturity into account before

assigning certain chores, such as lawn-mowing with a ride-on mower?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are ready to help your child have a healthy summer. For each no, try that idea.

"We cannot protect our children from life. Therefore it is essential that we prepare them for it."

—Rudolf Dreikurs

Get set for a strong finish

The last few weeks of school are just as important as the rest. To help your child stay focused and motivated to learn:

- **Clearly state** that you expect your child's best effort through the last day. Discuss consequences for shirking assignments and skipping classes.
- **Express interest** in schoolwork. Ask about class discussions. Show that you still care about what your child is learning.
- **Keep up routines.** If longer days have your child putting off schoolwork later and later, help get things back on track. Mornings come as soon as ever, and your child needs sleep to focus during class.

Offer fun reasons to write

This summer, help your child learn two things about writing. First, writing has a purpose. Second, it can be a lot of fun! Encourage your child to write:

- **Trivia questions** about a favorite topic. This lets your child demonstrate expertise.
- **Listicles**—short, fun lists like *Seven things seventh graders should know* or *The top five dog movies of all time*. To be taken seriously, your child will have to give reasons for the rankings.
- **Online reviews** of companies or products. Feedback is a purpose for writing.



Strike a screen balance

For many kids, summer means more screen time. But the key to keeping screen use positive is balance. Students may like to socialize with friends on social media, but they need face-to-face interactions, too. They need screen-free time to take on new responsibilities and explore new interests as well as time to relax with a movie. And they need fresh air and exercise to avoid the health issues linked to too much sedentary screen time.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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