

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

N. L. Dillard Middle School

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Prepare your child to succeed in the future by building skills now

Middle schoolers tend to be more concerned with what they will be doing next week than with life after high school graduation. And it's OK if your child doesn't have specific college or career goals yet.

But now is the right time to help your child build the skills that will make achieving future goals possible—whatever they may be. In any class or workplace setting, your child will need to be able to:

- **Think critically** and solve problems. Students often see things they'd like to change: a policy that doesn't seem fair; an equipment shortage due to lack of funding, etc. Brainstorm together about ways your child could help solve the problem, instead of just complaining about it.
- **Communicate effectively.** Help your middle schooler improve speaking and listening skills. For example, say your child wants you to change a curfew. Ask for a presentation on the reasons why you should. How has your child shown the responsibility to handle the change?
- **Make well-considered choices.** Demonstrate how to make a T chart. Write an option across the top of the T. Reasons to choose that option go on one side of the T, and reasons not to choose it go on the other. This lets your child clearly see how the pros and cons stack up.

Source: B. Cook, "College and Career Ready: What It Means for Middle School Students," Association for Middle Level Education.



Absent students are missing a lot

Attendance is always important, but the consequences of missing classes in the second half of the year can be especially tough on your child. That's because:

- **Remaining instruction time** is limited and every class is packed with essential material to help students stay on track.
 - **The pace of instruction** often picks up to allow time for review before end-of-year tests.
 - **Your child may have more schoolwork** to do as a result of faster instruction and review. The more class time your student misses, the more schoolwork piles up, which can be overwhelming.
- To help ensure attendance:
- **Make it clear** you expect your child to be in every class on time, prepared, and ready to participate.
 - **Allow absences only** in cases of illness or emergency.
 - **Schedule appointments** for your child for non-school hours.

Establish social media rules

In a recent survey of 10,000 students, more than half reported using social media by sixth grade. The survey also found that:

- **42% of eighth graders** don't pay attention to how companies track them online.
- **21% of seventh graders** say they rarely see someone stand up for someone being bullied or ridiculed online.

Middle schoolers need guidance in order to use social media safely and responsibly. Talk with your child about what is appropriate to post and what's not. Review privacy settings often. And insist that your child tell you about content that seems wrong or scary.

Source: "22 Insights for 2022 About Social Media & Student Well-Being," The Social Institute.

Encourage accountability

Accountable students honor commitments. Teach your child to:

- **Think** before agreeing to do something. Will your child be able to follow through?
- **Treat** goals as personal commitments.
- **Acknowledge** failures, and try to make amends.



Build a better vocabulary

Having a large vocabulary gives your child an advantage when it comes to reading. To add to word power, encourage your child to:

- **Read a wide** variety of materials.
- **Write down** new words that appear in the reading, and their definitions.
- **Use new words** in conversation.





Math is a struggle for my child. How can I help?

Q: My seventh grader says the math teacher “goes too fast.” The teacher says my child needs to pay better attention. I don’t remember much math. What can I do?

A: When it comes to math, you don’t have to know the material in order to be helpful. You can offer support and encouragement that empowers your student to find a solution. Here’s how:



- **Help your middle schooler think** through the situation. Ask questions like, “What have you done to make the teacher aware of your problems?” “What could you do differently to improve the situation?”
- **Encourage your child to talk** with the teacher. Then ask what they decided. If necessary, ask for a parent-teacher-student conference. In your meeting, ask questions to help clarify the issues. Ask how you can help.
- **Learn along with your child.** Don’t pretend to know more than you do. Instead, tackle the material together. “I don’t remember much about negative numbers, but I bet we can figure them out.” Look for online videos about the concepts your child is learning and watch them together.
- **Support effort.** When your child is working hard, bring a surprise snack. Say often that with effort, everyone can get better at math.



Are you encouraging wise use of time?

Knowing how to manage time will help your middle schooler meet deadlines, fulfill commitments and study effectively. Are you helping your child strengthen time management skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to write all academic and personal commitments on one calendar?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your child prioritize and tackle important tasks first?
- ___ **3. Do you have** your child create a weekly schedule with time blocked out for completing tasks?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child break down large assignments into smaller, more manageable parts?

- ___ **5. Do you set** an example by using your own time wisely?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child how to manage time. For each no, try that idea.

“Time is at once the most valuable and most perishable of all our possessions.”

—John Randolph

Support deeper reading

Middle schoolers need to know how to read for meaning, grasp inferences, and draw conclusions about what they read. To boost reading comprehension, help your child:

- **Ask questions before reading.** Have your child look over the text for any graphics or bold type, and jot down questions they raise. After reading, can your child answer the questions?
- **Acquire background knowledge.** Comprehension is linked to what your child already knows. Encourage a wide range of reading and activities.
- **Develop fluency.** Look for short articles of interest. Set a timer as your child reads aloud. Then challenge your child to read faster while still reading accurately.

Source: N.K. Duke and others, “The Science of Reading Comprehension Instruction,” *The Reading Teacher*, Wiley Periodicals on behalf of the International Literacy Association.

Extinguish angry outbursts

Preteens are notorious for strong emotions. But overreacting to an adolescent outburst just adds fuel to the fire. Instead, make it clear that pleading and tantrums won’t change your mind. Then reduce frustration and give your child a sense of power by offering choices. Say things like, “You can finish your report before you go for a run or after. It’s your decision.”



A report card helps you plan

Use your child’s most recent report card to chart a course for the rest of the year. If your student did well, talk about how to keep up the good work. If not, brainstorm together about ways to improve things going forward. “You did a great job of turning in science assignments, but you stumbled on tests. What if I quiz you a little on the material each night of the week leading up to a test?”

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