

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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Give your child opportunities to exercise good judgment

Parents and teachers often talk with students about the importance of doing the right thing, in school and in life. But knowing what the right thing is takes judgment—and children develop that over time.

To help your child acquire good judgment:

- **Provide increasing** amounts of responsibility for school routines. Start with the basics, like assignments. Explain that you will let your child decide independently on a reasonable amount of working time to complete schoolwork. If this goes well, let your student exercise judgment over another area. If it doesn't go well, ask what your child has learned from the experience. Work out a new plan together, and try again.
- **Discuss situations in advance.** What if a friend asked to copy your child's answers on a math assignment? Even when kids understand the fundamentals (cheating is wrong), they can get flustered when presented with tough situations the first time. Role-playing scenarios with you can help your child practice applying good judgment.
- **Help your child learn from others.** Examples of poor judgment are in the news every day. Ask your child to be a critic. How does your middle schooler think a person in the news could have made a better decision?



Take your child's opinions seriously

"Please at least let me finish speaking!" You've probably said something like this, at work or in a conversation with family members. Because even if you don't get your way, you want to feel your views have been considered.

Middle schoolers feel the same way. Giving students opportunities to express their opinions makes them happier, more engaged and more confident—which affects their motivation to do well academically.

When your student has something to say, take time to listen. If your child makes a good point—a reasonable idea about switching chores, or a compelling argument for staying

up later on Friday night—seriously consider it.

You may not always agree. But by listening attentively, you are helping your child build confidence to speak up and contribute in class settings and other areas of life.

Source: K.N. Marbell-Pierre and others, "Parental Autonomy Support in Two Cultures: The Moderating Effects of Adolescents' Self-Concepts," *Child Development*.

Sharpen writing skills

Few students want to write an extra research paper just for practice. So to help your middle schooler strengthen writing skills, suggest creative ways to write. Ask your child to:

- **Publish a family blog.** What quirks and traditions hold your family together?
- **Submit persuasive requests.** Have your child write why the request is a good idea and address possible objections.
- **Draft an end-of-year letter** your family can send to friends and relatives.



Let your child tackle issues

It's natural to want to smooth the path for your child. But parents who *always* do this keep their children from learning how to solve problems. If your child earns a poor grade, for example, ask "How do you plan to handle this?" You can help your student rehearse what to say to the teacher, but let your child do the talking.

Inspire a desire to strive

It's no secret that doing well in school takes effort. To fuel your child's motivation to work hard and do well:

- **Nurture curiosity.** Help your child find ways to pursue academic and creative interests in greater depth.
- **Offer positive feedback.** When you see your child working hard and making progress, say something. "Your effort is really paying off!"
- **Be patient.** Don't expect constant enthusiasm about school. With encouraging support from you, your child will likely recover a more positive attitude.





How much should I know about my child's school life?

Q: School has been going for several months, and I feel out of the loop about things like homework and test schedules. What should I be doing to stay up-to-date? Or should I leave it up to my child?

A: Staying aware of what is going on at school is an important way to engage with your child's education. To be informed *and* help your child learn to manage school responsibilities at the same time:



- **Touch base regularly with your student.** Ask for a daily update on each class. If every day is too much, set aside 15 minutes a week for your child to fill you in on what's going on. Knowing you are going to ask may motivate your child to keep track. And if a problem is brewing, your student will have a built-in opportunity to bring it up with you.
- **Contact your child's teachers.** Ask if there is a website or other online method for learning about activities in their class.
- **Make sure you can access** school communications methods, such as an online family information system, social media, emails, etc. Read everything the school sends out. This is the best way to stay informed about changes and policies. If you need help, ask the office staff.
- **Participate in school events for families.** It's a great way to connect with school staff and other parents—and to stay in the know!



Are you teaching social media safety?

Research shows that social media use among middle schoolers has grown significantly in the past three years. Are you reinforcing rules for safe social media use? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you reviewed** your child's privacy settings and discussed the dangers of sharing personal information?
- ___ **2. Have you explained** why your child should not post inappropriate photos or hurtful comments online?
- ___ **3. Have you set** limits on when and for how long your child can use social media?
- ___ **4. Have you made** it clear that you will monitor your child's computer and phone use from time to time?

- ___ **5. Do you tell** your child to alert you to hurtful, dangerous or scary posts by others?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child use social media safely. For each no, try that idea.

"Thirty-eight percent of tweens have used social media, and nearly one in five now say they use social media every day."

—The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021

Boost the power of notes

The better your child's class notes are, the more useful they will be when it's time to study. Share these tips with your student for capturing what's important:

- **Add details and diagrams** to hand-outs and outlines the teacher provides.
- **Listen for repetition.** If the teacher says it more than once, your child should write it down.
- **Write down lists.** These are often useful summaries of a concept. "The five stages of the cycle are ..."
- **Pay attention to pauses.** A teacher who stops talking is usually giving students a chance to write.

Discuss drug dangers

To middle schoolers, drugs and alcohol can seem to offer new experiences and relief from challenges. But substance abuse early in life increases the risk of addiction and damage to brain function, and can be fatal.

Ask what your child has learned in school about the dangers of substance abuse, and reinforce those messages. Say that you expect your child to avoid drugs, alcohol, tobacco and vaping products, including legal drugs prescribed for other people.

Art is an emotional outlet

Creating art gives kids a productive way to express themselves, and can even reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to:

- **Keep a sketch journal** of drawings based on thoughts and feelings.
- **Create a display** of items that inspire happiness.
- **Choose a color** that reflects the day's mood and make an "Add-a-little-each-day" design.



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