MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

April 2026

Moore Public Schools

Review five steps for making well-reasoned decisions

As students get older, they begin to make more decisions independently. Some choices have consequences that can affect their education and lives beyond school. It's vital that your child understand how to think decisions through and make wise choices.

Teach your child to:

1. **Collect needed facts.** Before deciding to take a job caring for a neighbor's dog for the weekend, for example, your child should find out what is involved. What are the tasks? What is the timing?
2. **Consider potential conflicts.** There's a test on Monday to study for, and your child has been asked to go to a friend's soccer tournament on Saturday. Can your middle schooler do both and still care for the dog?
3. **Think about possible outcomes.** If your child skips the soccer, will the friend be upset? If your child turns down the job, will the neighbor ever ask again?
4. **Brainstorm options.** Perhaps your child could explain to the friend that caring for the dog might lead to future dog-sitting jobs. Could your child go to a different game?
5. **Understand that even wise decisions** may have downsides. Sometimes a small sacrifice is necessary to achieve a long-term benefit.

React constructively to poor grades

You may feel upset if your child brings home a low grade. But expressing frustration or anger is unlikely to help. Instead, respond in a way that helps set your child up to make improvements:

- **Put grades in context.** Tell your child that grades matter because they reflect learning. However, they are *not* a measure of a person's worth or potential.
- **Focus on strengths.** Talk about things your child has done well, in an academic subject or other activity. Ask, "What are you most proud of doing?" Emphasize that your child can be successful.
- **Identify possible causes.** Low grades indicate a problem. Ask what your child thinks it is. Sometimes it's not academic ability but poor study habits or test anxiety, for example.
- **Talk to the teachers.** Ask for their views on what's happening and how to help your child.
- **Be realistic.** Expect effort and progress, rather than perfection.

Boost thinking with a chat

Thinking skills aren't fixed. Your middle schooler's ability to think can get sharper—and conversations with you can help. To encourage deeper thinking, discuss:

- **Things your child** has seen online or heard in the news. Get your child's opinions and ask for the reasons for them.
- **Open-ended questions.** "What have your teachers said about AI?" Ask follow-up questions.
- **Educational or news shows** you watch together. Discuss specific topics in them and what you've learned.

Art lets your child imagine

Art is a positive outlet for creativity and self-expression. Suggest that your child try:

- **Sketching** future self-portraits. What does your child picture doing in 10 years? 20?
- **Creating** a collage of items that inspire happy thoughts.
- **Making** an "add-a-little-each-day" design that reflects ideas, events or moods.

Motivate action three ways

If motivating your child to do just about anything feels like pulling teeth, these three strategies can help:

1. **Talk about tasks** that need doing *before* your child turns on a screen.
2. **Create routines** for recurring tasks. Maintain regular study times and bed- and wake-up times, for example.
3. **Support your child's interests.** Supporting things your child enjoys working on can inspire similar effort in other areas—like school!

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Q&A What can I do to help my child use time efficiently?

Q: My middle schooler wastes time, then runs out of time to fulfill responsibilities like schoolwork or chores. Plus, my child is often late. How can I teach my student to make better use of time?

A: Middle schoolers often underestimate the time it takes to do things. And many don't plan their time. They wait until they're "in the mood" to begin a task. Most need guidance in how to manage time better.

Encourage your child to:

- **Create a weekly chart** for planning time. Your child should list times of each day in 30-minute intervals.
- **Make a list of tasks to accomplish,** including schoolwork, chores, sports practices, etc., as well as desired activities, such as time with friends. Have your child estimate the time each task will take.
- **Insert each task** into the time planning chart. Remind your child to allow for some free time and unexpected events.
- **Set an alarm** to signal when it's time to leave for school or when the allotted time for an activity is up.

Have your middle schooler stick to the time chart for a week. Then, discuss strategies your child thinks would help to spend time more wisely.

Parent Quiz Are you making attendance a priority?

Regular school attendance supports academic achievement. Middle schoolers who miss classes often have trouble staying on track. Are you making the importance of attendance clear to your child? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you explain** why attending every class is essential through the last day of the school year?
2. **Do you encourage** evening routines—like packing school bags—to ensure your child gets to school on time?
3. **Do you reinforce** that absent students miss chances to ask questions and have to work harder to catch up?
4. **Do you discuss** school daily and brainstorm ways to address things that worry your child?
5. **Do you work** with the school to overcome attendance obstacles?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are teaching your child that school attendance is a priority. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"By working together—parents, schools and communities—we can keep students present, engaged and on the path to achievement. Every school day counts."
—Carey M. Wright

Prepare for the next stage

A big move is coming up for eighth graders. High school is just a few months away. To reduce anxiety and smooth the path:

- **Build excitement** about the new opportunities ahead for friendships, freedom and pursuing learning interests through a wider variety of classes.
- **Encourage your child** to reach out to school counselors and current high school students for answers to questions.
- **Attend orientation sessions** offered by the middle or high school.
- **Say that you are proud** of your child for reaching this milestone!

Ease stress with exercise

Excess stress can get in the way of your middle schooler's ability to learn. Research shows that regular exercise can be an effective remedy. Exercise helps people feel happier and calmer, and has a positive effect on memory and self-confidence. Help your child fit one hour of exercise into each day. Feeling in control physically may empower your child to take control of studies, too.

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

Model respectful behavior

To encourage respectful behavior, show your child what it looks like. Be a model of:

- **Honesty.** Admit your mistakes, and apologize when you are wrong.
- **Dependability.** If you tell your child you'll do something, do it.
- **Fairness.** Get all sides of the story before passing judgment.
- **Consideration.** Avoid embarrassing or making fun of your child.

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