MIDDLE SCHOOL

October 2026

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Cambrian School District

Ask questions to help your child find solutions for math problems

Helping your middle schooler with math may seem difficult if the concepts are unfamiliar to you. Don't worry! You don't need to have the answers to demonstrate how to tackle math assignments. The key is to ask questions that will help your child figure things out.

When your child is stuck, ask:

- **Which problem** are you working on? Help your child focus on one thing at a time. This can ease any feelings of intimidation your student may be feeling when faced with a whole sheet of equations.
- **Can you read me the instructions?** Reading directions out loud can help your child pick up on key words that were overlooked the first time.
- **Is there any part of the problem you can do?** Once your child gets started, things may become clearer.
- **Are there things you have learned before** that might help you?
- **Where could you look for more explanation?** Suggest that your child check the textbook, the class website or search online for instructional math videos on the concept.

If your child is still confused after giving a real effort, ask, "How soon can you ask the teacher for help?" Suggest writing down specific questions to ask.

Make your home a place for learning

Building skills and increasing knowledge aren't just school activities. When you promote and reinforce learning at home, your child becomes a stronger student. Here are some simple ways to enrich your child's non-school hours:

- **Engage in conversations** about all kinds of subjects. Ask what your child thinks. Listen and ask follow-up questions.
- **Teach life skills.** Assign your child meaningful responsibilities. Demonstrate how to prepare simple meals and follow a budget.
- **Ask about newly-learned** topics and ideas. What does your child find most interesting? Have your child explain concepts to you. Retelling information reinforces it in students' minds.
- **Introduce your child** to new things and experiences. Ask, "Can you think of a way this relates to what you are learning in school?"
- **Ask for help.** Have your middle schooler apply knowledge and skills to answer questions or help you with projects.

Turn reading into learning

When your child needs to learn and recall academic material in a reading assignment, a four-step approach can help. Encourage your middle schooler to:

1. **Skim the text** and pay attention to graphics, headings and boldface text to get an idea of key points.
2. **Read the text slowly** and take notes.
3. **Write a summary** of the main themes and supporting facts.
4. **Answer questions** about the material. If there aren't any at the end of the text, you child can make some up and then answer them.

Demonstrate organization

To help your child manage multiple classes and activities effectively, show how to use:

- **A planner** to record and see assignments and schedules in one place.
- **To-do lists** to stay on top of daily, weekly or monthly tasks.
- **Sticky notes** to jot down reminders or thoughts to come back to later.

Provide thinking practice

Middle schoolers are expected to research topics, think deeply about information and back up ideas with solid evidence. To help your child rise to the challenge, ask questions that require higher order thinking, such as:

- **Why** is your favorite so good? What characteristics make it better than other things?
- **How** could we do this better (or save money on this)?
- **Which** should we get? Which product or service is the best choice and why?

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Q&A My child won't say what's wrong. What should I do?

Q: My middle schooler is clearly upset about something, but doesn't want to talk about it. How can I get my child to open up without being too pushy?

A: It's common for adolescents to clam up when it comes to discussing problems with their families. But issues that drag on for days or weeks can affect health and schoolwork, so it is important to keep trying to find out what is bothering your child.

To open the door to two-way communication:

- **Express concern.** Say something like, "I can see there's something on weighing on your mind. I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about anything. It's my job to help you figure things out."
- **Define expectations.** "I respect your privacy and your desire to handle this yourself. Take a little more time to think things over, but I do need to know what's happening. Let's talk after dinner and see if we can figure it out together."
- **Reach out for support, if necessary.** If your child still refuses to talk, contact a school counselor, doctor, coach or other trusted figure in your child's life. Work together to discover what's going on and help your middle schooler manage it.

Parent Quiz Are you helping your child stay focused?

It takes concentration to pay attention in busy classrooms, read complex material and solve multi-step problems. Are you helping your middle schooler strengthen focus? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you establish** screen-free times and zones and have your child turn off unneeded devices and apps when doing schoolwork?
2. **Do you suggest** that your child set goals for each study session?
3. **Do you minimize** distractions when your child is working?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to engage in screen-free focus-building activities, such as making models or playing sports?
5. **Do you notice** and offer praise when your child persists and sees tasks through?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child develop powers of concentration. For each* no *answer, try that idea.*

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are."
—Steve Jobs

Supervise social media use

Research shows that the majority of 11 and 12-year olds use social media despite being underage. To learn to navigate this world safely, they need adult guidance. To help:

- **Set behavior standards.** No hurtful posts. No posting anything your child wouldn't want the whole world to see.
- **Protect privacy.** Review settings and limit who can see your child's posts.
- **Demonstrate balance.** Put phones away during time with your child.
- **Ask your child** to tell you about posts that are confusing or scary.

Source: J.M. Nagata and others, "Prevalence and Patterns of Social Media Use in Early Adolescents," *Academic Pediatrics*.

Help your middle schooler practice being responsible

Having some responsibilities at home helps your child learn to handle them at school. Avoid overload by assigning just a few new self-care responsibilities that fit age and maturity, like making school lunches or doing laundry. Then, allow your child to learn by experiencing consequences when responsibilities aren't met.

Foster traits for learning

Each student is an individual. But students who achieve in school share many qualities. To help your middle schooler develop:

- **Curiosity,** expose your child to new ideas and experiences.
- **Persistence,** help your child set goals and praise effort and progress.
- **Resilience,** encourage learning from mistakes and planning for improvement.
- **Confidence,** show your love and belief in your child's ability to learn.

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