

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dana Middle School  
San Pedro, CA

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## TESTING TIPS

### Take the stress out of testing

Does your middle schooler's stomach do flip-flops the night before a huge test? You can't take the test for him, but you can help him prepare for the big event:

- **Talk to your child.** Ask why he's so nervous. Does he not understand the material? Does he need help getting started? Sometimes just talking about it can make the situation less scary.
- **Help him make a study schedule.** Encourage him to set aside a little study time each day leading up to the test. This will prevent the need for cramming.
- **Carve out a quiet, well-lit place** where your middle schooler can study. Make sure he has all the supplies he needs—including a healthy snack.
- **Remind him of his strengths.** "I know you're worried about the big history exam, but remember how well you did on the last one?" Focus on the positives.



After the test, avoid overreacting. If your child ends up doing poorly on the test, don't explode. Instead, calmly go over what went wrong and talk about how he can improve things next time. Failing one test isn't a good thing, but it's no reason for hysteria, either.

Source: "Helping Your Child with Test-Taking—Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Dept. of Education, [www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html](http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html).

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Your support motivates your preteen

Studies show that positive adult influence is critical to kids' overall success. Kids with healthy adult role models:

- **Feel** secure, optimistic and content.
- **Are** less likely to cheat on tests in school.
- **Are** more likely to believe in their own success.
- **Are** more likely to earn good grades.

Here are some commonsense ways to keep your preteen motivated:

- **Avoid making** snap judgments about her character. Your preteen is more than just the clothes she wears. Get to know *her*.
- **Sing her praises.** Preteens often get a bum rap. When your child does something terrific, say so!
- **Respect her.** Don't dismiss your preteen's opinions because she's "just a kid." Pay attention to her.

Source: Anthony W. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*, ISBN: 0-8077-4476-X (Teachers College Press, [www.tcpress.com](http://www.tcpress.com)).

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Involvement is essential

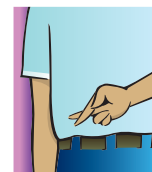
One of the most important assets to your child's school is *you*. Active family involvement tends to promote student success, says the National Middle School Association. Getting involved is easy. Visit the school. Do homework with your child. Talk with teachers. Your efforts will pay off!

Source: National Middle School Association, "14 Qualities Announced for Effective Middle Schools as 'Roadmap to Achievement'," [http://nmsa.org/news/Release\\_qualities.pdf](http://nmsa.org/news/Release_qualities.pdf).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Promote being honest

Parents are often shocked when they learn that their child has been less than honest. Perhaps your child has been caught stretching the truth in some way. To nurture the value of honesty in your child:



- **Give** your child chances to be honest. If you doubt him, say, "I'm having trouble believing you right now ..."
- **Point** out dishonesty when you see it.
- **Catch** your child being honest. Say something positive.
- **Never** overreact when your child is honest with you.

## DISCIPLINE

### Learn to pick your battles

If you constantly argue with your preteen, you'll both end up angry and frustrated. Instead, before challenging her on something, ask yourself, "Is this a big deal?" If the issue is something annoying—like her messy room—try to let it go. But if it's something dangerous or immoral, speak up.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents encourage good friendships in middle school?

**Q: My child has started hanging out with a group of kids who have a bad reputation. I want to stay open-minded, but I worry that she'll give in to peer pressure and follow some of their behaviors. What can I do without jeopardizing our good relationship?**

**A:** It's important that you talk with your child.

Ask about the kinds of things she likes to do with her new friends. What does she enjoy about them? What values does she share with them? It could be that they make her feel more mature. Or it could be that, like you, she isn't really comfortable with the way they act, but doesn't know what to do about it. To guide her through this tricky area:

- **Keep your conversation general.** Be careful not to single out any of her friends.
- **Withhold judgment.** Don't belittle her friends or insult their upbringing, parents, etc. This may make your child feel she must defend them.
- **Encourage your child to open up.** "It sounds like Jessie was pretty rude to the bus driver today. How did you feel when she acted that way?"
- **Don't criticize her** if she brings a problem about a friend to you. Just listen.
- **Be firm.** If you have real misgivings about some of her friends, step in. Limit the amount of time she is allowed to spend with them.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you sharing study time tips?

Some kids waste study time because they don't know how to get organized. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're preventing this:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you provide** your child with an assignment notebook and calendar?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to study when he's wide awake?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you help** your child break big assignments into manageable parts?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you prevent** TV, telephone and other distractions during study time?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you suggest** that your child make daily homework to-do lists?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer shows you're maximizing study time. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

*"Some people dream of success. Others wake up and work hard at it."*  
—Author Unknown

### Give your middle schooler a primer on respect

Does your preteen know the real meaning of respect? Teach him that respect simply means treating other people nicely.

Encourage him to:

- **Be kind** to others no matter what they look like or what their background is.
- **Speak** in a way that shows he values the listener.
- **Listen** without interrupting or using rude body language, such as rolling his eyes.

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Making inferences helps students gain knowledge

By middle school, your student needs to "read between the lines." This skill is called making an *inference*. Inferences are based upon clues in the text and clues from the reader's background knowledge. To make better inferences when reading a passage, teach your child to ask herself what is important, why it's important, how one event influences another and how one happening leads to another.

## IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

### Start with a good routine

As your middle schooler heads out the door each morning, a little foot-dragging is normal. Who wants to leave a snug bed for a day of classes? But good attendance is vital, and it's your job to make sure your child's in class *every* day. Here's how:

- **Enforce** a sensible bedtime.
- **Stick** to a regular morning routine.
- **Avoid** early-morning scrambling. Have your child prep the night before.



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