

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

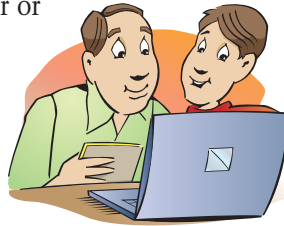
Dana Middle School
San Pedro, CA

December 2009

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Your influence is the key to success

Do you know who plays the biggest role in whether or not your child fulfills his potential? According to research, it's *you*! As a parent, you are extremely important when it comes to helping your child succeed in school and beyond.



You can go a long way toward keeping your child primed for learning all through his school years—just by creating a learning-friendly environment at home. Here's how:

- **Hang out together.** It sounds simple, but whether you chat at the dinner table or toss a ball back and forth outdoors, just spending time together supports your child's learning.
- **Share books.** Your child may be too old for story time, but how about reading alongside each other for a few minutes each night? If he's tackling a particular book for school, read it yourself. Later on, discuss it together.
- **Collaborate on a project.** What are your child's interests? Find a project that utilizes them. Does he like working with his hands? Build a birdhouse or bookshelf together. Is he bookish or computer-oriented? Go online and start researching your family tree. Any project you choose is likely to boost his learning skills.

Source: "Making the Most of Time with Your Child," ParentsCentre, www.parentscentre.gov.uk/_files/4C23C6851E09F41835D940BD2DF57C21.pdf.

DISCIPLINE

Let your child know what you expect

Your middle schooler cares very much what you think and wants to please you—even if she doesn't always act like it. But in order to behave properly, she needs to know what you expect. Here's what you should do:

- **Tell her exactly what you expect.** "You need to be inside by eight o'clock on school nights. No exceptions."
- **Help her understand** your rules, but don't justify them. "You can't play video games all night because it cuts into homework and family time."
- **Establish reasonable consequences.** Be very clear about what will happen if your child breaks a rule.
- **Don't nag.** Trust that she'll obey the rules instead of reminding her often. If she doesn't, be sure to enforce the reasonable consequences.

Source: Billie H. Frazier, Ph.D. and Bonnie B. Tyler, Ph.D., "Tell Your Preteens What You Expect," University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, www.agnr.umd.edu/ces/pubs/pdf/L249.pdf.

HOMWORK

Projects can be organized

Help your child make big projects more manageable. Have her:

- **Write due dates** for all assignments on a calendar.
- **Work backwards** for long-term projects. Write "mini deadlines" leading up to the due date—like "idea due" on the 3rd and "rough draft due" on the 8th.

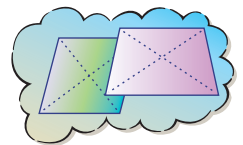
Check in with her occasionally to see how her project is coming along.

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Support math memory

Making a guide of phrases and pictures can help your child remember math facts. For example:

- **Illustrated shapes** show the difference between a rhombus and a trapezoid.
- **"My Dear Aunt Sally"** is a reminder to Multiply and Divide before Adding and Subtracting.
- **A drawing** of a pizza cut into slices shows fractions.



ENCOURAGING WRITING

Show that writing matters

What's the best way to encourage your child to write? Point out how writing is an important part of daily life. Here's how:

- **Include** him in writing tasks. Ask him to write a brief note in holiday cards. He'll be boosting his social skills, too.
- **Talk** about your writing at work. "This is a quarterly report I wrote." Point out that writing skills he's learning now—such as how to be clear and concise—may help him in his own career.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can I reconnect with my child?

Q: My daughter is in eighth grade. Not too long ago, I used to hear, "I love you, Mom," but now I hear, "Leave me alone!" Everything I do seems to set her off. What happened?

A: Mother-daughter relationships are always complex, but it's especially true as your daughter reaches the teenage years. Suddenly, she's running hot and cold—often in the space of a few minutes.

There is no magic to navigating this tricky time, but keeping these things in mind can help:

- **Expect some turmoil.** Your daughter will be irritated by some of what you say or do—no matter how you say or do it—so just accept it.
- **Remind yourself that it's about love.** Your daughter likely reacts to you so intensely because she loves you so intensely. Think about it: If she didn't care about you or your opinions, why would she bother reacting at all?
- **See things from your daughter's perspective.** Your attempts at a comforting word or hug may be her "proof" that you think she's still a baby. So keep this in mind the next time you ask yourself, "Why is she getting angry with me?"



PARENT QUIZ

Evaluate your child's study habits now

School has been underway for months. This is a good time for your middle schooler to brush up on study skills. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are encouraging strong study habits:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to block out time for study every night?
- ___ **2. Do you help** keep your child free from distraction during study time? (Examples: turning his cell phone off, discouraging lots of noise.)
- ___ **3. Do you suggest** study resources to your child? (Examples: the library, reputable Internet sites—many of these end with *edu.*)
- ___ **4. Do you share** study tips with your child? (Example: Items in the text printed in bold are usually important to know.)

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are supporting your child as she works on study habits. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

“One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared.” —Merlin Olsen

Mistakes lead to success

It's good for kids to take reasonable risks, knowing that no one gets everything right at first. Take these steps:

- **Give your child responsibilities.** They should be challenging, yet reasonable.
- **Allow small mistakes.** Let him see the results. Example: He spends his allowance too soon, and he can't buy something he wants.
- **Be understanding** as he learns. Say, "What could you do to keep that from happening again?" With enough practice, he'll succeed.

BUILDING CHARACTER

Raise a thoughtful child

Encourage your middle schooler to think of others. Here are some ways:

- **Make** requests in terms of helping the family. "Can you help by taking out the trash?"
- **Consider** others' feelings. "I wonder how Mrs. Johnson would feel if you brought her newspaper to her door?"
- **Explain** that others count on him. "I know your coach trusts you to make it to practice on time."

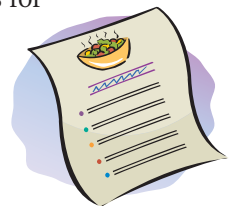
Source: Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children*, ISBN: 0-553-37429-X (Bantam, a division of Random House, www.randomhouse.com).

AFTER SCHOOL

Give kids creative outlets

Young children love to draw and pretend. But middle schoolers often need more encouragement to be imaginative. Here are some fun, creative ideas for your child:

- **Write** in a journal.
- **Redecorate** a room.
- **Act** in a play.
- **Invent** a recipe.
- **Daydream.**



Helping Students Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares. Writer: Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2009, The Parent Institute[®], a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021