

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dana Middle School  
San Pedro, CA

January 2010

## IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

### Is your child skipping school?

If you suspect that your middle schooler might be cutting classes or skipping school altogether, it's critical that you address the problem and get her back in class. Attendance is too important an issue to ignore. And, after all, she won't succeed in school if she isn't there.

Take the following steps:

- **Talk to her teachers or guidance counselor.**

Find out if there's something specific going on. Is she failing a class? Is she being bullied? If there's no definite problem, ask the school for help. Find out the school's policies regarding truant students and ask what the penalties are. Together with the school, try to work out an action plan.

- **Be straight with your child.** Tell her you won't tolerate her absences anymore. Let her know you've spoken with the school and that everyone is committed to keeping her in class. This is her chance to mend her ways.
- **Let her suffer consequences.** If you've outlined the consequences for the next time she skips, you must follow through. If you've told her you'll spend the whole day at school walking her from class to class, take time off work and do it. This may be awkward for everyone, but it just may solve the problem.



Source: Connie Collins, "Seventh-Graders Who Skip School," Family Education Network, <http://school.familyeducation.com/seventh-grade/working-parents/40819.html?detoured=1>.

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Learn with your middle schooler in 2010

Planning to make New Year's resolutions? Resolve to spend some learning-rich time with your preteen. Here are some ideas:

- **Ask about his resolutions.** Would your child like to become a stronger reader this year? Spend time at the library together. Is he hoping to ace history this spring? Commit to helping him review his class notes every week.
- **Get to know your child.** He's crazy about dogs, right? Um, wrong. That was three years ago. Now that he's in middle school, your child may have other budding interests—astronomy, painting, lacrosse—that he's eager to explore. Take time to learn what intrigues him *now*. Together, find ways to pursue those interests.
- **Watch quality shows together.** With your middle schooler, explore programs about nature, science or anything else that sounds captivating.

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Discuss expected behavior

You want your child to speak in a polite tone. But does he know exactly what this means? You may need to be explicit. For example, tell your child that:

- **Cursing** is not acceptable.
- **Backtalk**, such as *whatever* or *yeah, right*, is not acceptable.
- **Please** and **thank you** should be used.

Source: David Walsh, *Why Do They Act That Way?* ISBN: 0-7432-6071-6 (Free Press, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)).

## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Questions spark creativity

Almost all children like to answer "imagine" questions. It gives them a chance to be inventive. These questions are also great for building thinking skills:

- **Imagine** being famous. What would be the downside?
- **Imagine** you could go anywhere. Where would you go? How would you travel?
- **Imagine** you're starting a charity. What would it do?



## AFTER SCHOOL

### Balance leads to success

What do you do when your child's activities increase and time to do them decreases?

Outline priorities. Then, schedule time for:

- **Homework.** Check with teachers about how much time to set aside.
- **Extracurricular activities.** Set guidelines such as two activities per semester.
- **Home.** Your child needs family time—share a meal, take a walk or just talk.



Source: Peter L. Benson et al., *What Teens Need to Succeed*, ISBN: 1-57542-027-9 (Free Spirit Publishing, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

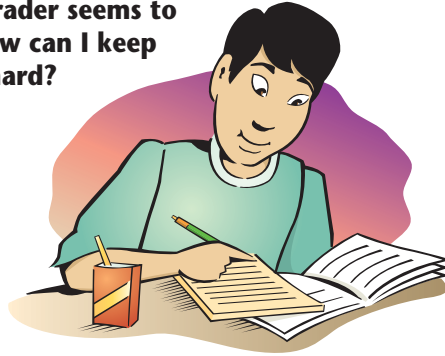
## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents support solid study habits in middle school?

**Q:** After a rough start, my eighth grader seems to be getting his act together now. How can I keep him on track without pushing too hard?

**A:** Although you want your child to continue down his current path, avoid micromanaging his efforts. To support his improved habits:

- **Let your child know how proud** you are of the changes he's made. "I think it's terrific that you're working so hard to get your assignments in on time." He may act like it's no big deal, but your approval means a lot.
- **Don't offer backhanded compliments.** When you're congratulating him on his good work, don't bring up his past habits. Don't say, "It's great that you're studying harder now. Remember all those tests you blew off last fall?" He already knows he made mistakes; there's no reason to rub his nose in it.
- **Pay attention to your child's new study habits** and support them. If he now hits the books before dinner, bring him a healthy snack while he's studying. If he's finally using his bedroom desk for schoolwork instead of storage, be sure his lamp is bright enough and his pencil cup is stocked.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you encouraging strong writing?

Writing is woven into every subject. And when writing improves, reading often does, too. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are encouraging stronger writing:

1. **Do you help** your child come up with descriptive, meaningful verbs? (Examples: *sizzled*, *towered*, *luxuriated*.)
  2. **Do you urge** your child to use active voice instead of passive? ("She sent the letter." Not, "The letter was sent by her.")
  3. **Do you point out** unusual or interesting things as possible topics for writing?
  4. **Do you model** the practical uses of writing for your child, such as writing a letter?
  5. **Do you suggest** that your child keep a journal?
- How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you have set your child on the path to good writing. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."  
—Toni Morrison

### Promote positive peer pressure for your child

Your child's friends volunteer for a good cause. They want good grades on the next history project. They enjoy movies and snacks at each other's homes rather than congregating in front of shopping centers. Your response? Support your child's activities. Welcome her friends to your home.

Source: Neil I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't*, ISBN: 0-7611-1570-6 (Workman Publishing, www.workman.com).

## DISCIPLINE

### Grin & bear it sometimes

You shouldn't laugh off *all* your preteen's annoying behaviors (or misbehaviors). But try to find a few chuckles where you can. Humor can actually:

- **Improve** your mood.
- **Help** you and your middle schooler deal with conflict.
- **Make** it easier to discuss sticky topics like discipline or house rules.

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Intriguing books appeal to middle school readers

Reading is too important to your middle schooler's success to ignore. Help your child find stories that captivate him. Look for books with strong, dynamic characters or first-person stories that tackle serious topics.

Try these suggestions:

- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie.
- The *How I Survived Middle School* series by Nancy Krulik.
- *Born Too Short: The Confessions of an Eighth-Grade Basket Case* by Dan Elish.



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