

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dana Middle School
San Pedro, CA

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DEALING WITH TOUGH ISSUES

Help your child banish bullying

Parents often think bullying is just a part of life. But it should be taken seriously. Bullied children become anxious. Some end up not wanting to go to school. Has your child talked about being bullied? Here's what you can do to help:



- **Figure out when** the bullying usually happens.
- **Tell your child to avoid the situation.** Is he always singled out on the basketball court after lunch? Suggest other ways he might spend his midday free time.
- **Teach him to respond appropriately.** How does he react? Would humor lighten up the situation? How about just walking away?
- **Encourage him to think positively:** "This isn't my fault."
- **Don't belittle him** or tell him to "toughen up." This isn't helpful. In fact, it's hurtful because it implies that he's weak.
- **Work with him on his social skills** to make sure he knows how to interact with others, strike up conversations, etc.
- **Help your child get involved in activities** with others that share his interests, such as through a club or team. Isolation can sometimes lead to being bullied.
- **Tell the school.** Teachers can take steps to ensure your child's safety.

Source: José Bolton Sr., Ph.D., L.P.C. and Stan Graeve, M.A., *No Room for Bullies*, ISBN: 1-8893-2267-9 (Boys Town Press, www.boystownpress.org).

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Five steps solve problems successfully

Is your middle schooler faced with a tough issue? Whether it's a problem at home, at school or anywhere else, have her follow these steps:

- 1. Define the issue** and set a goal for handling it. Poor grade in history? Have her write down "I want to bring my grade up to a B." "I want to do better in history" is too vague.
- 2. Brainstorm ways** to reach the goal. Have her write down her ideas.
- 3. Evaluate the options.** Have her ask herself, "Is this really doable?" Then make a list of reasonable things to try.
- 4. Develop a plan** for trying her ideas, such as a new study schedule.
- 5. Assess the plan.** Is she reaching her goal? Great! If not, have her choose another option.

Source: Susan Carney, "Problem Solving Skills for Teens," Suite 101, http://youthdevelopment.suite101.com/article.cfm/problem_solving_skills_for_teens.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Setbacks lead to growth

Don't just dismiss your middle schooler's frustration over a setback. Encourage her to grow from the experience instead. Give her time to get over her disappointment. Point out that everyone experiences setbacks. Praise her for coping with her disappointment. Remind her that a setback is an opportunity for a fresh start.

Source: "Motivating Kids," Families Online, www.familiesonline.co.uk/article/articleview/184/1/37.

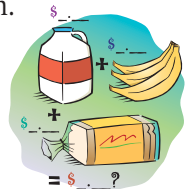
BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Review real-life estimation

"Daily life" math does not always require exact calculations. Practice estimating with your child whenever you can.

Ask your child questions like:

- "When should we leave to get to the dentist on time?"
- "We need to pick up a gallon of milk, a loaf of bread and a bunch of bananas. How much money do you think we'll need?"



Source: Patricia Clark Kenshaft, *Math Power*, ISBN: 0-2017-7289-2 (Addison Wesley Publishing Co., www.aw-bc.com).

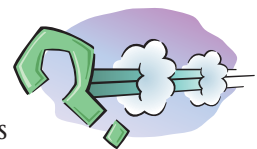
ENCOURAGING READING

Games expand vocabulary

Playing vocabulary games will help your child handle the many new words he will encounter in middle school and beyond.

Here are some to try:

- **Pick a topic**, such as *travel*, and see who can come up with the most words related to it. For example, *itinerary* and *passport*.
- **Name a word** and its synonyms (words with similar meanings). Two synonyms for *speed*, for instance, are *pace* and *rate*.



Set realistic expectations

Research shows that students often live up to parent and teacher expectations. But how *realistic* are your expectations? If you're only satisfied with perfection, your child may think, "What's the point?" and stop trying. To balance your expectations:

- **Encourage** your child to do his best.
- **Note** *effort* and not just results.
- **Do not** compare your child with others.
- **Remember** your expectations are for *your child*, not for *you*. Don't expect him to do what you wish you had done.
- **Celebrate** your child's special interests.

Source: Donald E. Greydanus, M.D., *The American Academy of Pediatrics Caring for Your Adolescent Ages 12 to 21*, ISBN: 0-553-07556-X (Bantam Dell, www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell).

STUDY SKILLS

Share note-taking tips

Listening when the teacher talks is critical. And your child should especially make sure she takes notes when the teacher:

- **Lists** facts—"Five causes of ..."
- **Mentions** the *best*, the *weakest*, etc.
- **Talks** about concepts more than once.
- **Says**, "This is important."

Source: William R. Luckie and Wood Smethurst, *Study Power*, ISBN: 1-57129-046-X (Brookline Books, www.brooklinebooks.com).

HEALTHY HABITS

Sleep matters!

A lack of sleep can make it tough for kids to focus on learning. To help your child get enough sleep:

- **Enforce** a regular bedtime.
- **Limit** his caffeine intake from things like cocoa, soda, iced tea and chocolate.
- **Ban** before-bed TV. Studies link late television watching to sleep problems.

Source: "Sleep Problems," University of Michigan Health System, www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/sleep.htm.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents prepare for meetings with teachers?

Q: I feel that one of my child's teachers is assigning way too much homework—sometimes two hours per night! I have scheduled a meeting with the teacher. What should I do to make our time together productive?

A: If you feel there's a real problem with the amount of work your child is expected to complete on a daily basis, it's reasonable to speak with the teacher about it.

To make the most of your meeting:

- **Be prepared.** Talk to your child. Is your child having a hard time understanding that particular subject? Write down your concerns.
- **Offer the teacher** specific examples of the problem. "Last Tuesday, the 19th, the assignment took my daughter over 2 hours to complete."
- **Listen carefully** to what the teacher says in response to your concerns.
- **Ask for clarification** if something seems confusing.
- **Give yourself time to reflect** on what you and the teacher discussed. Can you come up with any new ideas or solutions that maybe didn't occur to you before or were not brought up at the meeting?
- **Ask for a follow-up meeting**, if necessary.

By working together, you'll find a solution to the problem.

Source: Jeanne Shay Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, ISBN: 1-57542-168-2 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child keeping up attendance?

The holidays are over, spring seems far away, and your child may not always "feel like" going to school. But don't let your child's attendance slip! Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're promoting good attendance:

- ___ **1. Do you make** it clear to your child that he *must* be in school unless he is truly sick or there is a family emergency?
- ___ **2. Do you urge** your child to stick to a regular schedule to keep mornings running smoothly?
- ___ **3. Are you aware** of how to access information (TV, Internet, etc.) about weather-related school closings?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to get everything ready for school the night before?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to wash his hands regularly and dress for the weather to minimize the chances that he will become ill?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are promoting good attendance for your child. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"The world is run by those who show up."
—Anonymous

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